

The Jackson
factor in
election '88

IN THESE TIMES

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part three:

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tracking down the
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From now on, the Democrats need to reach blue-collar workers

By David Moberg

CHICAGO

Now, after neither Iowa and New Hampshire nor Super Tuesday clearly defined the Democratic presidential race, the big Northern industrial states get their chance to pin the tail on the candidate. But they will probably act no more definitively over the next two months than their predecessors did.

The March 15 vote in Illinois only muddled matters more. Sen. Paul Simon won, with 42 percent of the popular vote. He was helped by his homestate popularity and by a two-decade history of local squabbles and ill will that limited Jesse Jackson's ability to reach whites with his new message (holding him to 33 percent). Also, Gov. Michael Dukakis, who finished with 17 percent, was unable to establish the inevitability of his nomination. Yet without his favorite-son status, Simon isn't likely to be a strong contender anywhere—with the partial exception of Wisconsin—and will mainly nibble away at Dukakis' upper-income liberal votes, slowing the steady march of the Massachusetts money machine.

The message: The biggest question in the industrial states is who will reach the critical white, blue-collar families, whose Democratic loyalties weakened under Reagan but who now may be ready to vote Democratic. They are epitomized by 57-year-old electrician Joe Ferrier, a Reagan enthusiast in an old Chicago suburb, who said as he picked up his ballot, "I'm voting Democratic because there's no industry left in Cicero."

Ironically, the message for reaching the Joe Ferriers has emerged, but the successful messenger hasn't. The key is tapping anger at the big corporations, expressing an economic populism of the little guys against big business, mixing in an economic nationalism that insists on reversing economic decline and growing inequality.

"There has to be a populist piece to the Democratic message," argues pollster Stan Greenberg, who has been studying Michigan voters. "Populism cuts across ideology. That populist message perceived to be a move to the left is really a move to the right, which brings in discontented blue-collar voters who may be racist and anti-tax but are anti-corporate." But if that message can bring back Reagan Democrats and mobilize new voters, it's also "a message without very much risk," Greenberg said. "There's almost nobody who's pro-corporate. Even yuppies are suspicious and don't think corporations are doing their part for America. Economic nationalism doesn't have to be protectionist and can reach beyond the work-

ing class."

The focus on corporate betrayal of the American economy also provides Democrats with an alternative to both the Reagan mantra—"government isn't the solution, it's the problem"—and to a Democratic focus on having the welfare state pick up the tab for the ravages of corporate economic abuse.

The man behind the message: Jesse Jackson not only initiated the attack on corporate irresponsibility and power, but also has articulated it most forcefully. And he has most clearly immersed himself in popular fights against loss of jobs, farms and income. In Illinois, for example, he twice joined rallies of workers at a General Electric appliance plant slated for closing in all-white, historically racist Cicero. "I decided he's the only Democratic candidate who makes sense for working people and the poor," said Local Sheet Metal Workers' union president John Agrela. Even a white Republican maintenance worker from Cicero, Tom Hayes, said he could vote for Jackson: "I like the way he sticks up for little people and gets votes without much money."

So far, Jackson has more than doubled his white vote since 1984 with his attack on barracudas eating up the little fish. His broadened base in the white community has contributed to his impressive showings in states like Alaska (which he won), Vermont, Maine, Minnesota and Massachusetts. Along with near-unanimous black support, it has made him first in popular votes and nearly tied with Dukakis in delegates. But there is a widely held assumption that an invisible, insurmountable barrier of race holds down Jackson's potential. Apparently in an effort to broaden his appeal, Jackson is increasing his emphasis on fighting drug use as a campaign issue. That has led many patronizing observers to recast Jackson as an understudy for Nancy Reagan, minimizing the importance of his economic message.

In Illinois Jackson did disproportionately well among self-identified blue-collar voters and among those making less than \$12,500 a year, according to the CBS/*New York Times* exit polls, but those figures probably reflect the makeup of the black vote (overwhelmingly for Jackson, but with a surprisingly modest turnout) as well as Hispanic (40 percent for Jackson). Jackson got only 7 or 8 percent of white votes in the state, one of his lowest figures yet.

Many whites here saw Jackson as a confrontational, flamboyant troublemaker representing only black interests. That viewpoint reflected exposure to the Jackson of an earlier era and the racial divisions in local politics of recent years. There were anecdotal reports of a self-conscious anti-Jackson vote for Simon by some Republican crossovers and conservative Democrats. Despite his appeal to workers, Jackson probably picked up most white votes among ideological liberals from peace advocates to union organizers (41 percent for Jackson in the CBS poll).

No other messengers: But if Jackson can't break down completely the racial barriers to him as messenger, the other candidates have a hard time carrying the message. Rep. Richard Gephardt's chances for revival in the March 26 Michigan caucuses look slim with his Super Tuesday defeats, money problems and lack of firm United Auto Workers (UAW) support. Albert Gore is waiting to snatch up the same blue-collar voters, but his campaigning to "put the White House on the side of working people," to fight corporations and "powerful interests" and to "return the Democratic Party to the neighborhoods" won him few votes in Illinois. Such rhetoric rings hollow from Gore—tactical campaign trappings worn like a hard-hat prop.

Both Simon and Dukakis seem ill-disposed to pick up the theme. Now Simon's advisers are trying to make him talk like a fighter for the little guy, but Simon's instincts are to be a welfare-state liberal, doing nice things for needy people, not battling the powerful. Dukakis stresses getting business, labor and government to sit down and talk together as a solution for economic problems. Also,

"Dukakis is very much a cheerleader for good news, the bright economic future message," Greenberg observed. "He's not comfortable talking about the rot in this country. The other part of economic populism is the economic nationalist message, and Dukakis describes himself as an internationalist."

But while Dukakis' conciliation toward corporate power hurts with blue-collar Democrats, it may help with some middle-class supporters, like computer-software saleswoman Susan Hoffman. "I think he'll do well because he isn't a threat to corporate business," she said at a Dukakis rally. "He won't rock the boat."

In a major economic speech in Chicago, Dukakis said that "this nation's great industrial heartland has been under attack," then bloodlessly identified the aggressor only as "the forces of change." In the speech and campaign appearances designed to boost his appeal to workers (but not in his TV ads mistakenly preoccupied with arguing against a brokered convention), Dukakis put great

INSIDE STORY

emphasis on getting corporations to invest in workers and new technology. But the main mechanism he offered was the laudable but inadequate provision of limited trade protection in exchange for firm commitments to modernize. The model for Dukakis, much as the Chrysler bailout was a model for Mondale, is the Milwaukee Harley-Davidson motorcycle factory that reinvested and partially recovered with temporary tariffs.

Dukakis argued for expanding trade, using existing laws to reduce barriers to U.S. products, and generally "out-hustling" the competition. But when asked what he would do about U.S. corporations that shift their manufacturing overseas and are a large part of the import "competition," Dukakis responded, "We all know why that happened," blaming the 1981 tax cut, budget deficits and the overvalued dollar. The governor is correct that the strong dollar sped the capital flight, but it also occurred before 1981 and continues today, despite the weak dollar incentives for domestic manufacturing. Dukakis, unlike Jackson, was unwilling to question corporate judgment and priorities.

Dukakis' economic strategy also includes

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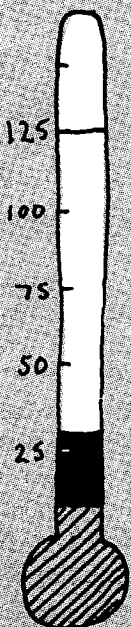
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Inching along won't do



Last week was not a good one for our \$125,000 fund drive. We received only \$2,844, bringing our total so far to \$29,821 from 744 subscribers. In addition, one additional subscriber agreed to become a sustainer, for a total of 27 new sustainers so far this year.

The rate of donations is painfully slow. Although the number of donors this year is considerably higher than it was at the comparable time last year, the amounts sent are less. That means we need many more contributions to meet our goal. So if you have not yet sent us a check, please do so now. They should be sent to us at 1300 W. Belmont Ave., Chicago, IL 60657.

1000'S OF DOLLARS

By Salim Muwakkil

CHICAGO

SOMETHING PROFOUND IS HAPPENING IN America," said Rev. Jesse Jackson upon learning of his close second-place finish in the Illinois Democratic primary and his new front-runner status.

Noting recent victories in Alaska and South Carolina and his second-place finishes in states with small black populations like Maine, Vermont, Minnesota and Idaho, Jackson asked, "Who would have thought that after 30 contests I would be in front?" It's almost inconceivable that a black man would be leading the race for the Democratic presidential nomination 23 years after the bloody march for voting rights in Selma, Ala., he said.

Jackson's inference that racism is on the wane seems reasonable. After all, a significant number of whites ostensibly are willing to support him for president and, considering this country's racist history, that is a profound development. But racism is not just a question of history, it's also a topic of current events. In fact, shortly before Jackson's primary successes began sparking hopes of racism's retreat, many commentators were bemoaning its recrudescence.

Just last month black students at the University of Massachusetts and Hampshire College, both in Amherst, Mass., occupied campus buildings to demonstrate displeasure with racist activity on their campuses. Similar protests have been heard on several college campuses across the country, leading many observers to conclude that racism is on the rise.

Those who make that argument also cite the growth of organized groups professing white supremacist ideals. The latest of such groups to gain the public eye is a group of apprentice fascists who shave their heads as identification and call themselves "skin-heads." It's a recycled version of a British group with the same label and ideology that reached its apogee circa 1976.

But those adolescent expressions are only a small part of what some have identified as resurgent racism. That youth find appeal in such tripe is distressing and casts a pall on the future, but it's the adult advocates of these racists ideologies who present the most pressing danger. The Fort Smith, Ark., trial of 14 white supremacists charged with conspiring to overthrow the government by force once again has focussed public attention on the menace these proliferating groups pose.

No contradiction: While Jackson attracts growing numbers of whites to his presidential campaign, black students stage more demonstrations protesting racism. For some, this is not a contradiction.

"Those ostensibly opposing trends are part of the this-a-way, that-a-way paradox of American reality," explained Martin Kilson in a recent interview. Kilson, professor of government at Harvard University and a noted political analyst, said he's not confused by reports that racism is rising and falling simultaneously. "American life is always some crazy admixture of forward and backward movement."

Kilson said the historic dimension of Jackson's candidacy is more significant than the reports of growing racism. "In many ways, Jackson's surprising campaign is evidence that America is growing up," he noted,

Jackson's ascent and the dynamic of racism

"and the left has to learn how to admit that." Readiness to criticize this country, he insists, should be matched by a willingness to acknowledge positive developments. "We on the left lose credibility if we fail to give the system its due."

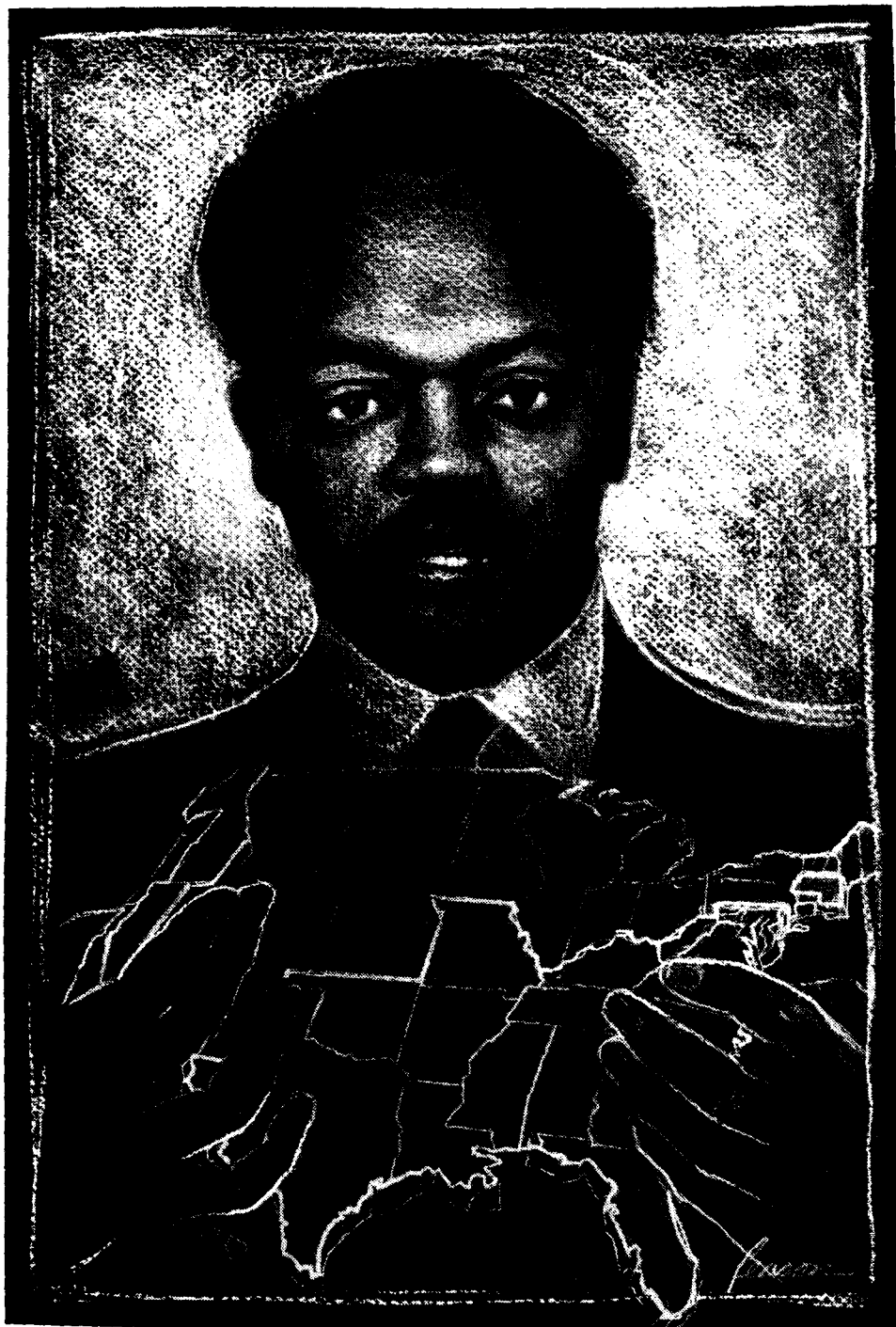
Some analysts see Jackson's growing white appeal itself as fuel for racist reaction. "There's nothing paradoxical or contradictory about this situation," explained Vincent Harding, a widely-published scholar with a long history of involvement in the movement struggles. "Whenever it has appeared that blacks were ready to make a significant breakthrough there's always been panicky white reaction."

Harding, who is professor of religion and social transformation at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, said it's "totally understandable that some whites are reacting to Jackson's success by pushing predictable buttons of racism." But he said the effort is worth it. Like Kilson, Harding expressed strong support for Jackson's pathbreaking campaign. He praised the candidate as "the best thing that's happened to American electoral politics."

Mixed messages: Jackson's de-emphasis of racial politics has tripped up some of his erstwhile allies who had based their strategies on the politics of racial solidarity. In Chicago, Jackson's embrace of the Cook County Democratic slate confused many of his supporters, who—though the county ticket was also endorsed by the late Mayor Harold Washington—expected him to stand with those who had second thoughts about

Jackson is attracting more whites than in '84. But black students still protest campus racism.

CAMPAIGN 88



the late mayor's strategy.

Until the last minute, many of those organizers insisted that Jackson was officially neutral in a pivotal race for the clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County between former Mayor Jane Byrne, the slated candidate Aurelia Pucinski and a black candidate, city commissioner Thomas Fuller. Many of these strategists even hinted that Jackson leaned toward Fuller. But during the weekend preceding the election Jackson left no doubt of his choice. He campaigned vigorously with Pucinski, who is the daughter of one of the late mayor's strongest and most consistent City Council foes. And she won the election.

But Jackson's efforts on Pucinski's behalf seem to have had little effect on his appeal to white voters in his home state. According to incomplete returns, he pulled just over 8 percent of the white vote. What's more, there's evidence that Illinois voters staged something of a stop Jackson movement in casting their ballots for Illinois Senator Paul Simon. Exit polls indicated that nearly 40 percent of Simon's voters didn't expect him to win the Democratic nomination. "Rather than vote for Dukakis and enable Jackson to win, a lot of people voted for Simon," explained Cook County Republican official James Dvorak.

Defusing fascism: Some of Jackson's more fervent supporters contend that his populist appeal is effectively stunting the growth of racist groups rather than provoking a backlash. "Jesse is the only candidate competing with those racist groups for the populist vote, and he's winning," said Robert Starks, a Jackson campaign adviser and professor of political science at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago.

"By reaching out for rural whites, he's defusing a lot of the fascist racism that's right below the surface in much of agrarian America," Starks added. "And he's received very little credit for this." Starks said Jackson has directly taken on the virulent anti-Semitism that lurks in this country's heartland and "offered those who trace all of their problems to a 'Jewish conspiracy' alternative explanations for the deteriorating situation in which they find themselves."

Jackson's effect on the political climate is much more difficult to assess. While he has spurred voter registration in some regions of the country, his influence has been negligible in other areas. Candidates with large black constituencies readily ride his coattails, but those seeking support from a wider racial spectrum are less enthusiastic about receiving his imprimatur.

"For black politicians as well as for whites, Jackson is a much more acceptable candidate in '88 than he was in '84," said Linda Williams of the Joint Center for Political Studies, a Washington-based think tank that focusses on black issues. "Outside of the black community, however, his political coattails still aren't very long," she added.

"Jesse is a little like John the Baptist," explained Clarence Page, editorial writer and columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*, in that he's preparing the way for other black politicians who may be more acceptable to the general electorate. Page says Jackson's positions are too far left to garner wide electoral support but that his political savvy and obvious intelligence have changed forever the way many whites look at blacks. "That may not mean that race doesn't matter anymore, but it's a healthy step in the right direction." □

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INSHORT

By Joel Bleifuss

Red threat, real profit

When the U.S. sent 3,200 soldiers down to Honduras last week it was ostensibly at the request of President Jose Azcona Hoyo, not the more powerful Honduran military. It is common knowledge that the U.S. Honduras has long been the major beneficiary of the U.S.-contra war against Nicaragua. Less well known is the fact that the Honduran military has helped maintain that flow of U.S. military and economic aid by giving qualified support to the contras and not antagonizing the Sandinistas. This policy is examined in "Honduras: The War Comes Home," a 27-page, three-part report in the current issue of *Report on the Americas*, a publication of NACLA (North American Congress on Latin America).

Trump or sluff: Victor Meza, of the Honduran Documentation Center in Tegucigalpa, in his article "The Military: Willing to Deal" reports that the Honduran military governs itself internally by a 52-member military parliament called the Superior Council of the Armed Forces. This parliament, says Meza, uses the contras as "the ultimate trump card in relations with Washington. The decision to permit the counterrevolutionaries to deploy freely in Honduran territory and maintain a network of encampments along the Nicaraguan border is the armed forces' exclusive responsibility; civilians can do little but reinforce the military strategy with diplomatic activity." When the U.S. balks at increasing aid or meeting other demands, the Honduras military restricts the contras' movements.

Nicaraguan contacts: The Honduran military has also helped "diffuse tensions" through an established "network of underground contacts" with the Nicaraguan government. According to Meza on Jan. 27, 1986, two high-ranking army officers held secret talks with Nicaraguan military officials along the Honduran border. That same day, back in Tegucigalpa, Jose Azcona Hoyo was being sworn in as president. These contacts may even have led to cooperation between the Honduran and Nicaraguan military. On March 17, 1986, the Honduran military apparently allowed the Sandinistas to enter Honduras in pursuit of the contras. And on May 30, 1987, the Honduran military prevented contras fleeing Nicaraguan troops from crossing back into Honduras.

Breakdown after talks: In October and November 1986, Nicaraguan and Honduran military officials held a series of meetings in Panama. The Nicaraguans were then apparently granted permission to chase the contras into Honduran territory without reprisal. But, according to Meza, "on the night of December 4 a mysterious incident occurred: a Sandinista contingent attacked an observation post, killing two Honduran soldiers. In one of the most dangerous incidents between the two countries, the Honduran Air Force retaliated, bombing two Nicaraguan villages, Wiwili and Murra, on December 7."

No-win war: Last Wednesday, as the president was crying "Invasion!," Honduran army spokesman Col. Manuel Suarez Benavides told the *New York Times*, "We have no concrete information that Sandinista troops have crossed our border. What I can say for certain is that no Honduran military units are engaged in combat in that area or anywhere else." The military appears intent on avoiding a full-scale war. For no matter who wins such a war, the Honduran military loses. A Nicaraguan win would damage the military's public image and thus weaken its control over Honduran society. On the other hand, a Honduras-assisted contra victory means that the U.S. would divert much of the aid it now sends Honduras to support a contra-controlled Nicaragua. Consequently, says Meza, the military has tried to follow a policy that "many describe as 'cynical pragmatism'—maintaining the latent threat of war without letting it become a reality." It is a profitable policy. In fiscal years 1982 to 1987, the U.S. poured more than \$1.16 billion in military and economic aid into Honduras.

Central America is (not) falling

As President Reagan was readying troops for a Central American adventure, sensible voices were being heard in Congress. Said Democrat Rep. David Obey of northern Wisconsin, "Right now, members are trying to ascertain the facts before we respond to Chicken Little."

Another rat graduates

As Ronald Reagan's ship of state begins to sink, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officials continue to jump (In Short, Sept. 16, 1987). According to a source at the EPA, Marsha Wil-

The peace process



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Invasion: The Nicaraguan side of the story

MANAGUA—Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega termed the sudden dispatching of 3,200 U.S. troops to Honduras March 16 as the "gravest threat" Nicaragua has faced in its long confrontation with the U.S. Although President Reagan said the action demonstrated the "seriousness" with which the U.S. views the Central American situation, the old bogey of a direct invasion suddenly became a real possibility.

Nicaragua took the message accordingly. The moment word reached Managua that Washington "did not rule out any option" in responding to a purported Sandinista "invasion" of Honduras, the entire country went on alert.

Most radio stations hooked into a central radio link-up to await the latest bulletins. Correspondents and individuals called in to the stations to express their readiness to encounter "any eventuality." Spontaneous rallies were held in towns and

cities around the country. The mood of crisis deepened. Hospitals were readied to receive casualties, while revolutionary slogans and songs filled the airwaves.

Though it all ran a strong sense of *deja vu*. Almost exactly two years before a similar scare occurred during a large-scale Nicaraguan offensive in precisely the same border region. At first Honduras downplayed that incident, with President Jose Azcona even deciding the crisis should not interrupt his holiday on the beach. Although the Honduran position changed after Washington played up the "invasion," the 1986 Holy Week incident quickly faded in importance.

Last Wednesday Honduran military authorities and even the Foreign Ministry declined at first to confirm the "invasion." By mid-afternoon confusion reigned as to whether Washington jumped the gun in responding to an "urgent request" for U.S. help from Azcona. Confirmation that Tegucigalpa had indeed asked for U.S. troops did not come until late evening.

Early Wednesday afternoon a rela-

tively calm Daniel Ortega said he had talked with Azcona three times during the previous 24 hours, explaining in detail the border operation and even requesting a personal meeting. Ortega said he also contacted the other three regional presidents and proposed that an international commission inspect the border.

What actually happened? This major Sandinista offensive had never been secret. Ortega announced it on International Women's Day, March 8. As on previous occasions, he stressed the need for "combat readiness," despite signs that cease-fire talks would be renewed on the highest level.

While the border incident captured the most attention, the offensive was actually occurring throughout the country. It had nothing to do with Honduras, but everything to do with taking full advantage of the contras' increased vulnerability in the wake of the U.S. cut-off in their aid.

With aid suspended, the contras have been forced to fall back close to supply caches they had stored in several parts of Nicaragua. The remote border area near San Andres

de Bocay is the most critical of these areas. It is their "rear-guard," a window for their activities. From there units penetrate into Nicaragua and supply flights land on small airstrips. And it is to there that the rebels retreat.

According to a European military analyst based in Managua the Sandinista objective was to encircle and trap the contras in precisely that area. It is highly likely the Nicara-

guans did briefly cross into Honduras to cut off the contra retreat. The analyst believes the Sandinistas decided not to repeat the error of a similar operation last May, when they avoided crossing the Coco River and thus failed to trap the rebels.

"In this way the government could essentially reestablish the military edge they held until last year," the analyst said. That advantage was re-

moved largely due to U.S.-dispatched Red-eye missiles that the contras have used to deadly effect on superior Sandinista air power.

For Nicaragua, the military gains were paramount. But the sense of urgency also boosted revolutionary morale among the Nicaraguan population, and strengthened Managua's hand heading into the cease-fire talks.

—William Gasperini

Radioactive milk shakes up Mexico

MEXICO CITY—What do you do with nearly 17,000 tons of Chernobyl-contaminated powdered milk? If you're the Mexican government, the answer is easy—you put it on a boat and send it back to Ireland.

Not so easy is answering questions about the several thousand tons of powdered milk missing from the original shipment. Missing tons that have probably filtered onto the Mexican market through a combination of government corruption and pilfering by employees of CONASUPO, the government's basic foods distributor.

The saga of the Chernobyl-contaminated milk began June 3, 1987, when three Cypriot ships arrived at the Mexican port of Veracruz. Shipping records show the three boats were carrying 16,958 tons of powdered milk and 22 tons of butter that had been sold by the Irish Dairy Board to CONASUPO. The milk powder sat in Veracruz warehouses until December when the Public Health Secretariat (SSA) tested it for radioactivity. SSA was acting on reports that Mexican navy cadets had drunk CONASUPO milk and fallen ill.

Homeless turn to courts in search of rights

The National Coalition for the Homeless thought it had won a major battle last year when Congress passed a billion-dollar bill to fight homelessness. But the coalition then had to sue to get the Department of Education to release \$5 million the bill had targeted for homeless schoolchildren.

"As homelessness has exploded into a national problem it's become an issue that should be addressed by the federal government on a national level," says Maria Foscarinis, the Washington counsel for the National Coalition for the Homeless. For advocacy groups like the coalition, that means lobbying Congress to pass new laws, and suing Uncle Sam to enforce current law. Armed with last year's bill, known as the McKinney Act, recent right-to-shelter decisions from several state courts, Depression-era laws protecting the poor or mentally ill, and even portions of the Napoleonic Code, the focus of homelessness litigation is shifting from state to federal courts.

"It's an expanding field in the

sense that after you establish the right, you're back in court enforcing it," says Foscarinis. "We're planning to press ahead on both fronts." Although most of the federal suits so far have sought to enforce existing statutes, Foscarinis foresees a time soon when the federal courts may force Congress to pass a homeless-rights bill. But that approach has proved controversial among advocates for the homeless.

"Getting people off the street isn't so much a matter of their abstract rights as who's going to pay," says Gary L. Blasi, who is both the director of homelessness litigation for the Los Angeles Legal Aid Foundation and a director of the National Coalition for the Homeless. Blasi explains the recent flurry of federal litigation not as a bona fide movement, but as a localized response to a single piece of litigation.

"It's the state cases where the action is," says Blasi. "I don't know of any serious litigating lawyer who thinks that there is the chance of a snowball in hell of this federal judiciary establishing a right to shelter."

Despite the recent victories in federal courts, a reversal of the 1974 Burger Court decision finding no

Environmentalists charge that the missing milk was filtered onto the Mexican market through a combination of corruption by government officials and petty pilfering by Veracruz warehouse workers. But since the government shows no inclination to provide a detailed accounting, the fate of the missing milk may never be known.

Meanwhile, the Irish government is silent. A spokesman for Ireland's Honorary Consul says Mexico has not made a formal complaint. And in Dublin, the Irish Dairy Board pleads ignorance. Virtually the only trade between the two countries is Ireland's sale of powdered milk to Mexico—39,100 tons totalling \$33.6 million in 1987.

No one has yet explained why milk from Ireland was contaminated and not milk from other European nations. The contaminated shipment of powdered milk was originally reported to have come from Northern Ireland. But the British Embassy in Mexico City issued a denial that offers some explanation. "Well, it rained in Ireland after the Chernobyl disaster," an embassy spokesman told one reporter. "In Britain, it didn't."

—Mike Tangeman

explicit constitutional right to shelter is unlikely under the more conservative Rehnquist court.

But Peter B. Edelman, a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center, argues for building a case state-by-state.

"If you can find states that are willing to declare an entitlement to shelter under their own law, then down the road the Supreme Court might pick up on that," says Edelman.

If a federal right to shelter is established, advocates for the homeless hope to work toward establishing the right to permanent shelter. But that will not be easy. Most of the federal suits have been brought by non-profit legal services whose budgets have been slashed under the Reagan administration. Furthermore, advocates say, the Reagan judiciary is uninterested in establishing and protecting the rights of homeless people.

"It's really a matter of luck," says Foscarinis. "A lot depends on what judge you draw. Judges are more conservative, much less willing to go out on a limb, to cover cases that are not explicitly spelled out in the statute."

—Jonathan Gill

liams, the former director of the Office of Solid Waste (the EPA entity that writes regulations controlling the disposal of solid and hazardous waste), recently left her \$72,000 a year position and went to Browning Ferris, the nation's No. 2 toxic waste dealer. Last fall Browning Ferris and Waste Management (waste dealer No. 1) pleaded guilty in Ohio to felony charges of price-fixing and trade restraint. They were each fined \$1 million. Still pending are about two dozen federal grand jury investigations of the two companies.

Election rigging in Korea

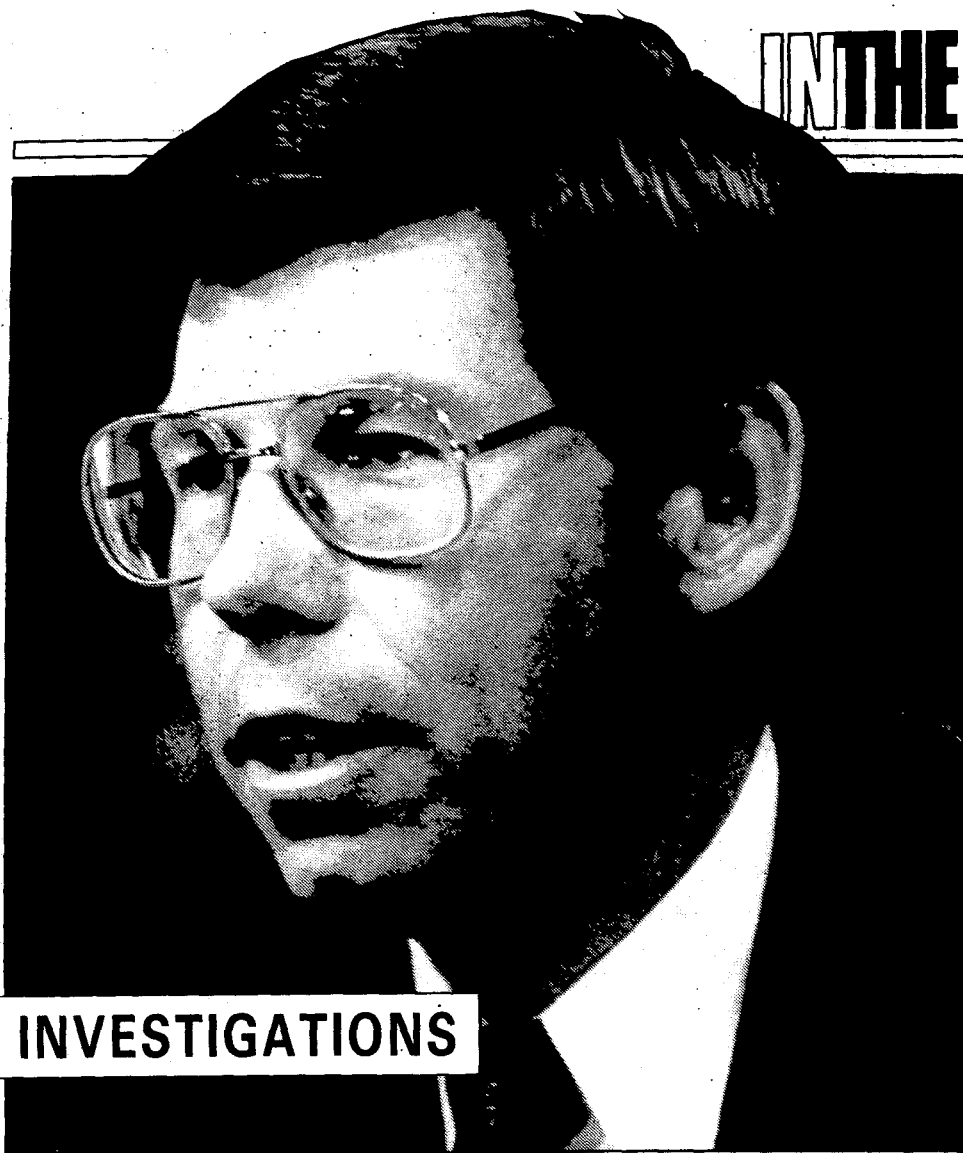
Two Catholic priests have filed a lawsuit charging the Chun Doo Hwan government with rigging South Korea's December elections. The priests, both of whom were members of groups that monitored the election, maintain that in many instances the government computers announced final vote totals for districts where the counting hadn't been completed. They also note that the election results didn't necessarily correspond to the televised results. In some cases the number of votes for candidates decreased as time passed. Furthermore, in the course of its coverage, the state-controlled television network changed the total number of voters who participated in the election 25 times. The two priests claim that the election results were planned in advance by the government's Election Management Committee.

Chernobyl fallout

In the summer of 1986, 35,000-40,000 more Americans died than usual. In a normal year, 31.7 percent of the nation's deaths occur during the May to August period. But in 1986, 33.1 percent of that year's deaths occurred in the summer. The *Economist* of Britain reports that Dr. Jay Gould, of the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, believes these "extra" deaths may have been caused by the April 1986 Chernobyl disaster. He discovered that the greatest rise in 1986 summer deaths—a 5 percent increase—was found in the Pacific states of Washington, Oregon and California. That was also the area of the U.S. that received the most radioactive fallout from Chernobyl. Milk produced in that region had higher-than-normal concentrations of radioactive iodine-131. (At its post-Chernobyl peak, milk in Washington state contained about 1,850 percent more iodine-131 than it did in 1985.) Nuclear industry experts contend that exposure to low levels of radiation is harmless. Although occasional doses of low-level external radiation like X-rays may be relatively safe, radioactive material that is inhaled or ingested can be dangerous. According to Dr. Ernest Sternglass of the University of Pittsburgh, after radioactive material enters the body it travels to specific areas, where it continues to emit radiation. Iodine-131 for instance ends up in the thyroid. Such internal radioactive contamination damages the body's ability to manufacture the hormones and white blood cells that fight disease. The people who would be most affected by a radiation-induced weakening of their immune systems are those already suffering from life-threatening illnesses. Dr. Gould found that when comparing May-August 1985 to May-August 1986, the number of people who died from pneumonia rose by 18 percent, the number of people who died from all infectious diseases increased by 23 percent and the number of people who died from AIDS was up by 60 percent. In the September-December 1986 period those comparative figures dropped dramatically, but still remained significantly higher than January-April 1986.

Nuclear humbug

If you suffer from radiation poisoning, you should have bought Survivor, the "personal, consumer-oriented, radiation warning receiver, designed to be the first line of defense for the average citizen." Marketed by Threshold Technical Products of Cincinnati, this \$185 device works like a smoke detector, plugs into a wall socket and, if you choose, fits in a coffee cup. The company maintains that using this "home radiation detector may save your life—and your family." And Survivor promotional literature anticipates your doubts: "[You say] 'The nearest nuclear power station is hundreds of miles away; therefore, I don't have to worry.' WRONG. You do need to be concerned. It is possible to be exposed to radiation in your own home. How? Do you live near a major interstate highway or near a transcontinental rail line? If the answer is YES, then you can be living in a high-risk area for a nuclear accident."



INVESTIGATIONS

The Iran-contra committee's Bill McCollum: where was his aide when Pastora was bombed?

The Vista Distribution case: an Iran-contra story nobody wanted to listen to

By Jim Naureckas

LAST WEEK'S INDICTMENTS ON CONSPIRACY charges of four Iran-contra principals have brought the Iran-contra scandal back into the news. But the media seems convinced that serious journalistic investigation of the affair is no longer needed. Instead, the press has simply waited for independent counsel Lawrence Walsh's inquiry to tell them what the facts are.

Yet a close look at the record of the official investigations thus far reveals many unexplored tantalizing leads. New information, some never before published, suggests that even the ostensibly independent inquiries may have been undermined from inside, and in any event served the same damage-control purposes as the Reagan administration's own inquiries.

The frustrating course of the government's investigations can be illustrated by one man's struggle to get his evidence heard. Bob Fletcher, a toymaker who was until recently based in Marietta, Ga., claims to have stumbled on a front company involved in secret arms sales, contra aid and overtures to Iran. *In These Times* investigated his story at length in its February 17 issue.

Fletcher became involved in the situation when his business was bought in early 1985 by Vista Distribution USA, a company controlled by a man named Gary Best. According to Fletcher, Best was no ordinary entrepreneur. Best's contacts included retired right-wing generals like Harry Aderholt and John Singlaub. And Fletcher claims the proceeds

from Best's businesses went to fund a variety of covert operations. A number of details in Fletcher's story seem difficult for him to have made up, and his general allegations are corroborated by other witnesses.

After being forced out of the company in December 1985, Fletcher took his story to the government: the Pentagon, the State Department, the FBI, the CIA and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

Fletcher assumed that if the government was informed, it would take action against what he thought were obvious illegalities in the Vista operation, such as the company's unlicensed arms dealings. But nothing happened. Later, when the Iran-contra scandal began to break, it became clear that many of the government agencies Fletcher had contacted were involved in the same operations he had witnessed at Vista.

Going to the authorities: In early 1986 Fletcher contacted the offices of the U.S. attorney in Miami, Leon Kellner, after reading press reports that his office was investigating reports of gun-running to the contras. "I said to them that...I wanted to give them some information I had. And they became very defensive right away and said, 'No, no, we're not. We're not doing any investigating.'"

In fact, Kellner's office was investigating the illegal contra supply network. But Kellner called the investigation off in May 1986. "I'm under a lot of pressure from Washington," Kellner said, according to an assistant quoted in the *Village Voice*. "Don't you know there's a [contra aid] vote coming up?"

That pressure may have come in part from

Assistant Attorney General Stephen Trott, the top official in the Justice Department's criminal division. A March 1986 memo from Trott, released by the congressional Iran-contra committee without fanfare, instructed a subordinate to "watch over" Kellner's investigation of contra-related Neutrality Act violations. After noting the case's connection to Lt. Col. Oliver North's National Security Council, Trott told his assistant, "Call Kellner, find out what is up, and advise him that decisions should be run by you."

Trott later called FBI Director William Webster to have him halt an investigation into Southern Air Transport, a former CIA airline that worked on both contra resupply and the Iran arms deals. The investigation, which followed contra-supply operative Eugene Hasenfus' crash-landing in Nicaragua, was halted until after Attorney General Edwin Meese publicly admitted the Iran-contra connection.

Given Trott's interest in sensitive Iran-contra inquiries, it is not surprising that when Fletcher contacted the Justice Department in December 1986 he was referred to Trott. Given Trott's apparent track record in squelching those inquiries, it's not surprising that nothing came of Fletcher's conversation with the official.

A white-Walsh: Fletcher had no more luck when he contacted Walsh's ostensibly independent investigation. The Walsh probe relied on FBI agents to investigate the toymaker's story. Walsh's inquiry is apparently working closely with the FBI, which is disturbing, in view of the bureau's more-than-friendly relationship with North, one of the key subjects of the probe. Before North left his National Security Council job, the FBI kept him informed of how investigations against his operations were going. The use of FBI personnel to investigate Vista is made doubly dubious by the comment Best made to Vista employees: "The FBI owes me a favor."

Fletcher's lawyer, Linda Steele, says she was told by Bill Charniak, an FBI agent working for Walsh, that Best works for the government and that Fletcher's information was "not important."

Initially, Fletcher and his lawyer got a more helpful response from the congressional Iran-contra committee. Attorney Steele says that the investigator who took Fletcher's information, Cameron Holmes, told her that "diversion money or Iran-contra money...had gone through Gary Best." (Holmes would not comment on Steele's account. A committee official told *In These Times* that no Iran arms sale money was diverted to Best.) Two days after this report, Holmes was off the case, replaced by two investigators who have fueled critics' doubts about the committee's integrity: Thomas Polgar and Bob Bermingham.

Polgar is a CIA veteran who ran the agency's Vietnam program, and therefore has connections to the many contragate figures who were involved in U.S. intelligence there. His tenure as CIA station chief in Saigon was marked by misleading reports being sent to Washington on the progress of the war. (See *In These Times*, June 10, 1987.)

Polgar, who was brought into the committee by Sen. Warren Rudman (R-NH), went to Costa Rica in April 1987 to investigate the La Penca bombing, an attempted assassination of disaffected contra Eden Pastora, allegedly by forces linked to the CIA. His inquiry was so superficial it left Pastora wondering, according to Leslie Cockburn's *Out of Control*, "Was that man really from the

Senate?"

Bermingham, a former FBI investigator, wrote a memo to committee chairman Lee Hamilton (D-IN) claiming that widespread reports of cocaine smuggling by contra forces were baseless. The memo, first revealed by Murray Waas in the *Boston Globe*, claimed that "hundreds" of interviews were conducted, although the *Globe's* committee sources said that "a handful of individuals were interviewed at best." But the memo helped kill any interest the committee had in the drug issue.

When Polgar and Bermingham interviewed him on July 6, 1987, Fletcher says, they showed a marked lack of curiosity about most of his revelations. Polgar's only interest was how Vista's telex messages were coded. "The crux of the whole thing," says Fletcher, "was that whatever I had, none of it seemed too relevant, and it was nice meeting you and don't worry about it, forget it."

Polgar told *In These Times* he found no connection between Best and the U.S. government, and therefore the matter was outside the scope of the committee's investigation. "We were not looking into all the sins of the world," he said.

Another dead end: Fletcher also attempted to reach the Iran-contra committee through his congressman, Iran-contra committee member Bill McCollum (R-FL). McCollum called Fletcher at home during the hearings' June 1987 recess, and seemed very interested in the story until Fletcher mentioned that Best had claimed President Reagan was helping out the operation by giving Best and others diplomatic passports. "He didn't want to hear another word after that," Fletcher says.

McCollum was probably not the ideal lawmaker to contact. Not only was he one of the most conservative members of the committee, but critics have raised questions about links between his top aide, Vaughn Forrest, and the contra support network. According to a deposition given to the Christic Institute, a liberal legal group, Forrest and North's aide Rob Owen met in McCollum's private office to discuss non-lethal aid for the contras while such aid was still illegal. Owen had previously testified in a Christic deposition that on the night of the La Penca bombing, Forrest had been in Costa Rica with Owen at the house of contra operative John Hull, named by the Christic lawsuit and press reports as a key figure in the bombing.

Losing faith: Committee sources say they were hampered by time and resource constraints, and could not follow up every valid lead. The same might be said of other agencies that were told about Vista. But another explanation was offered by a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms investigator, who told Fletcher that "the feedback I got was that it was some sort of CIA operation. So I just finished off my report and sent it off."

That kind of discretion seems to have pervaded the inquiry into the Vista operation. Investigators may have meant to protect the secrecy of intelligence operations, but in the process they fatally compromised their own credibility.

"I've always taught my children," says Bob Fletcher, "that if you see something that's wrong, you go to the proper authorities." With the many similar leads that were left unexamined by the official Iran-contra investigations, Fletcher is not the only one who has lost faith. □

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

THE GERMAN STEELWORKERS, PIONEERS IN the battle for a 35-hour work week, recently won a new reduction of work time with no loss of pay. But the German left is currently quarreling over whether or not shorter hours should mean less pay.

The issue of wages and hours, horrendously complex and technical, is an argument for experts. The ordinary citizen is stuck in the position of a patient listening to doctors argue about the diagnosis. The patient's life is at stake, but there's no way of telling which remedy will work.

The illness threatening European societies is unemployment.

A problem with no end in sight: All studies project mass unemployment deepening in Western Europe. The free-market economic policies of the Reagan era offer no way out. The policies were sold to the public on the grounds that creating favorable conditions—like low wages and taxes—for business would attract investment, which would in turn create jobs. By now it is clear that most investment in technological improvement destroys jobs.

The projections are inescapable: as productivity rises, the need for labor descends. The amount of gainful employment in industry continues to shrink drastically in proportion to productivity. The problem is two-fold: maintain the volume of the working-class share of the product and at the same time spread it around.

In Italy: In his March 4 opening address to the Communist Working Men and Women's Conference in Rome, Antonio Bassolino proclaimed the collapse of the Reagan period infatuation with free enterprise, saying labor must again be at the cutting edge of social progress. In fact, after eight or so years of defeats, the Italian labor movement has in recent months been bouncing back.

Bassolino recently announced that labor and the left must henceforth concentrate on reducing working hours. He endorsed the 35-hour work week as the immediate goal, with the prospect of a European-wide 30-hour work week in 10 or 15 years.

The head of the General Confederation of Italian Labor (CGIL), Antonio Pizzinato, suggested that the "1990 centennial of May Day can be the occasion for a worldwide reflection on the 30-hour work week."

In France: The labor movement here is too weak to mount a campaign for shorter hours. But the idea of a "guaranteed minimum income," usually set at about half the minimum wage, is gaining ground among politicians.

In Germany: On February 2 the Ruhr steel companies and the metalworkers union IG-Metall signed a contract granting 130,000 steel workers a 36½-hour week with no loss of pay. The new hours, which will go into effect in November, mark another big step in IG Metall's progression toward the 35-hour work week that began when the union succeeded in reducing the work week from 40 to 38½ hours after a seven-week strike in 1984.

Management's unanticipated agreement to the new time-cut can only be explained by the popular mobilization in favor of West German steelworkers that has been going on this winter. The movement exploded last December when Krupp went back on an agree-

ment worked out with the workers last summer, suddenly announcing that it was shutting down its Rheinhausen steel plant on the outskirts of the Ruhr city of Duisburg. The remaining 6,200 jobs at Krupp's Rheinhausen plant are about all that keep the community economically alive in Duisburg, where the unemployment rate is already at 17 percent. Hundreds of thousands of steelworkers demonstrated in Ruhr cities, with support from a nationwide movement of solidarity.

In such an atmosphere the steel barons may have decided a tactical retreat was in order. But the war is not over.

The largest European union, IG Metall has fought the hardest for the 35-hour work week—and explicitly as a means of spreading a shrinking amount of work among as many job-seekers as possible.

Yet at its moment of success, and as the Public Administration and Transport Workers union (ÖTV) was in turn engaged in negotiations for a shortened work week, a jarring note came from the Social Democratic Party (SPD). On the eve of the publication of his new book, titled *Die Gesellschaft der Zukunft* ("The Society of the Future"), Saarland Prime Minister Oskar Lafontaine, the hero of the SPD's left wing since his opposition to Pershing 2 deployment, began criticizing the unions' refusal to let wages be cut proportionally along with hours. Lafontaine advocates a "new definition of work for the third industrial revolution" based on the concept of "socially necessary work," including both wage labor and housework.

In a speech on February 7, Lafontaine warned that unemployment can be solved only if working people "share not only work but also income and wages with those who have no jobs." Lafontaine said he favored the 35-hour week, but not maintaining full pay, at least not for those with high salaries.

Editorialists hailed Lafontaine's vision and courage, while enthusiastic praise came from unemployed groups and from business circles. But unions' reactions mostly ranged from skeptical to aghast.

Then in a cover article on Lafontaine, the weekly *Der Spiegel* pointed out that his new stand was foreshadowed in an analysis of the Social Democrats' 1987 electoral flop that had been completed last fall. The study concluded that the Social Democrats' only chance to get back into office was to be an acceptable partner to the Free Democratic Party (FDP) of Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, not only in foreign policy, but also in economic and social policy. The Social Democrats must appear able to take on "the modernization of society and the economy" and not simply be a caretaker of the social security safety net.

The FDP usually scores between 5 percent and 9 percent of the vote in local and national elections, but its influence is proportionately greater because it is first of all the party of leaders of the liberal professions and high-tech industries. In 1983 the Free Democrats changed the government in Bonn by simply shifting their alliance from the Social Democrats to the Christian Democrats.

Der Spiegel reported that Lafontaine, a possible SPD candidate for chancellor in 1990, along with other SPD leaders, including party treasurer Hans-Ulrich Klose, recently met discreetly with captains of industry to discuss economic policy. It may be significant that the party chose former Hamburg Mayor Klose as its treasurer. A major center

Shorter work week: who pays?



EUROPE

SPD leader Oskar Lafontaine: solidarity with the unemployed or selling out workers?

of East-West trade, Hamburg is also a fortress of business support for the SPD-FDP coalition, which was recently restored in that city-state after the SPD and the Green Party failed to put together a coalition.

New-age solidarity: Lafontaine got a chance to taste organized labor's displeasure at a weekend convention of the Social Democrats' Study Group for Labor Questions in Wiesbaden. Chairman Rudolf Dressler sharply rejected the Saarland leader's "new concept of work." "The demand for shorter hours with less pay is nothing other than a way of enabling capital to grab up the whole benefit of increased productivity for its own side," Dressler argued. Anyone who doesn't grasp that hasn't grasped how distribution questions are really settled in this society, he said.

Who does grasp how distribution questions are really settled? Whether conservative or radical, organized labor militants know from experience that redistribution of income is the result of a relationship of forces, of "class struggle"—a concept that is distinctly out of style.

Lafontaine's concept of "solidarity" rings more bells with the new age post-industrial visionaries. Solidarity implies giving up the class struggle required to wrest a larger share of the fruits of productivity gains away from capital as a whole for the working class as a whole. This struggle tends to be written off as lost because of capital's mobility—its ability to flee from any country where the heat is on from organized labor and head for some distant poor country crammed with starving proletarians. Instead, the working class should concentrate on dividing up the global sum conceded by capital—the wage mass—among the class as a whole, both those gainfully employed and those without jobs.

Lafontaine told the Wiesbaden gathering that the Social Democrats could neither influence the international economy nor undo the policies of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's conservative government. But it had a "duty of solidarity with the unemployed." Lafontaine compared the situation to the aftermath of a robbery. If most of the provisions have been stolen, those who have something left are obliged to share with those who have

nothing. Delegates pounced on the fatalistic moralism of this stance. One stressed that the point was to "catch the robbers" and make them pay back, instead of "searching for coalition partners among them."

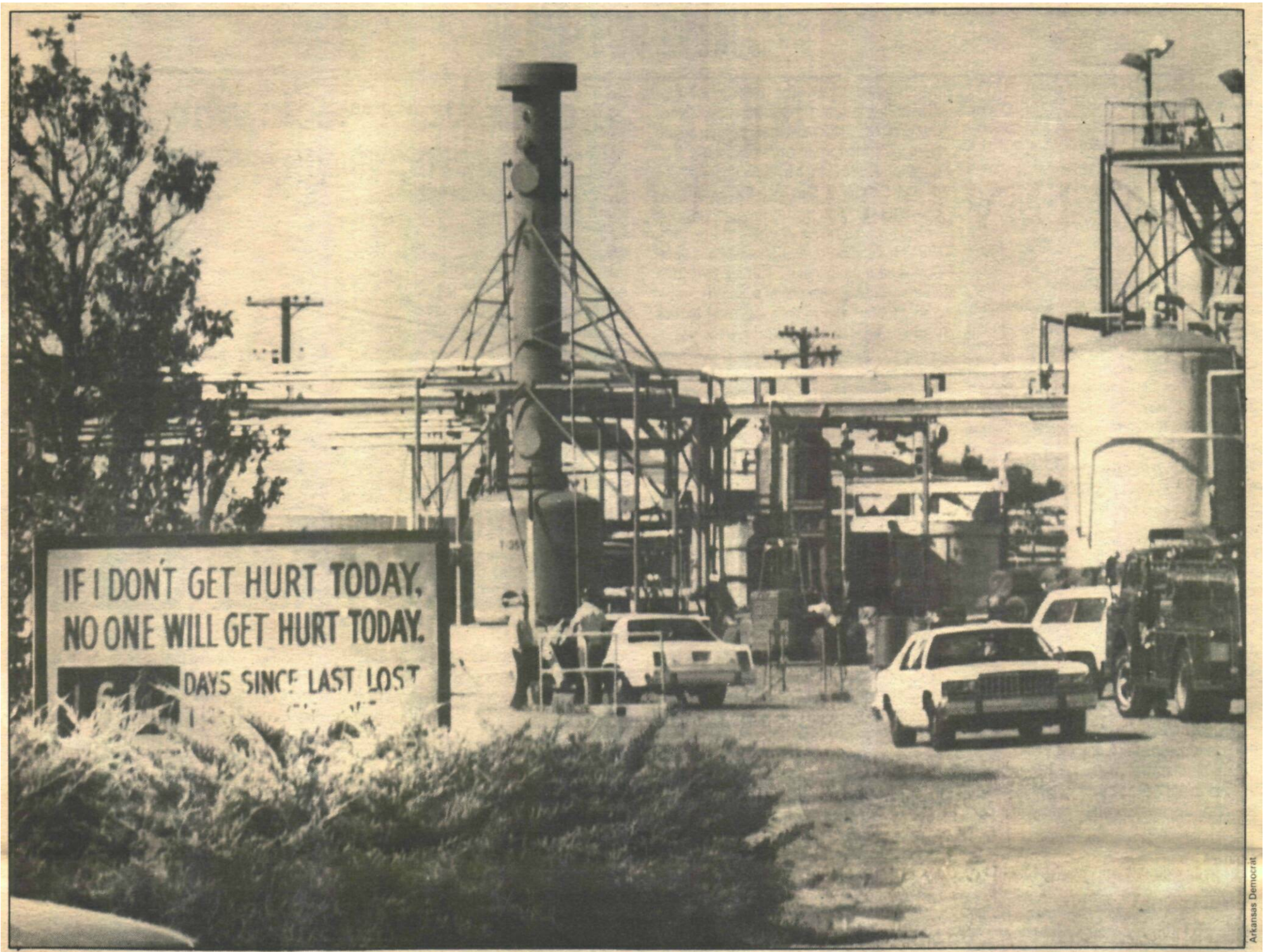
Metalworkers union Chairman Franz Steinkühler said that at a time when collective bargaining was underway, Lafontaine's statements worked "almost like a dagger in the back."

Steinkühler acknowledged that teachers might be asked to give up part of their income for unemployed teachers. A North Rhine-Westphalia official has suggested that the state could hire 6,000 unemployed teachers if all working teachers gave up two hours of work time along with the corresponding salary. The public employees union ÖTV negotiates for everybody up to the highest level, allowing room for shifts in the salary mass to create jobs.

But Steinkühler said that in an industrial economy, the union has absolutely no influence over the upper-income groups. "Can anyone imagine how great a shift in power must first be achieved in this society before we could force employers to commit themselves by contract to create new jobs?" he asked rhetorically.

The head of the Federation of German Trade Unions (DGB), Ernst Breit, said sarcastically that if employers would commit themselves to use the savings from 5 percent work time and pay cuts to create 5 percent more jobs, the unions would immediately agree. His point was that in a free enterprise system, nothing guarantees that wages given up by workers will go to into wages for new jobs.

In an interview with *Die Tageszeitung*, Rudolf Dressler rejected as unfair the accusation that the unions have done nothing for the unemployed. On the contrary, he said, "against the bitter opposition of employers" the German unions have turned down offers of higher wages to stick to the fight for shorter hours on behalf of the unemployed. Creating or at least saving jobs has been the major motive underlying the Metalworkers union campaign for the 35-hour week, and, in the process of bargaining, this has meant sacrificing wage demands in favor of shorter hours. □



The conclusion of In These Times' three-part investigation into the dioxin contamination of Jacksonville, Ark., focusses on the chemical companies involved. In unveiling the hidden ownership behind Vertac Chemical Corporation, it is revealed for the first time that the city's toxic disaster extends outward to envelop two of the nation's largest multinationals. Their connections to an obscure and once quiet community pose troubling questions that go far beyond Arkansas.

By Dick Russell

JACKSONVILLE, ARK.

THIS IS A STORY OF CORPORATE INTRIGUE and manipulation, a journey through the labyrinthine world of the makers of toxic chemicals. It attempts to answer this question: who bears the ultimate responsibility for thousands of leaking barrels of dioxin-laden chemicals and other poisons in this Arkansas community—a place that can justifiably be called the most serious hazardous waste area in the U.S.?

An *In These Times* investigation has tracked a corporate maze extending far beyond the contaminated chemical plant in Jacksonville, 12 miles from the state capital of Little Rock. It includes not only a network that stretches into five other nations—Panama, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden and Japan—but also hidden ownership and shady deals. It points to the quiet involvement of the former chief executive officer of the Diamond Shamrock Corporation and the potential liability of one of the chemical industry's giants, Dow Chemical.

The intricate maze illustrates how bigger companies use smaller ones—like Jacksonville's Vertac Chemical Corporation—to keep up production of lucrative, but potentially deadly, products. Then, when push comes to shove over liability for the toxic hazards posed by these chemicals, the companies sometimes square off to implicate each other. Although they often publicly appear to be corporate "enemies," they collude behind the scenes to tie the hands of government regulators, lawmakers and citizens. Employing small armies of attorneys, they are able to stall remedies and avoid product restrictions indefinitely. Employing sophisticated public relations staffs, they are able to stay out of the national limelight.

Legacy of neglect: Jacksonville, a city of 30,000 people, is a case study in such corporate maneuvers. Its pollution woes far surpass those of the Love Canal landfill near Niagara Falls and of Times Beach, Mo., where in both places residents were evacuated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Yet except for a 1980 story published in *Life* magazine, the major media have ignored the Jacksonville situation. A former Vertac public-relations employee, David Simmons, admits that "when inquiries came [from major media outlets], generally the local stories had enough holes in them that they were discreditable."

Yet the EPA found Jacksonville's toxic saga very credible indeed. In recent years it designated three different areas for Superfund cleanup. The agency estimates that disposal of the nearly 30,000 drums of hazardous

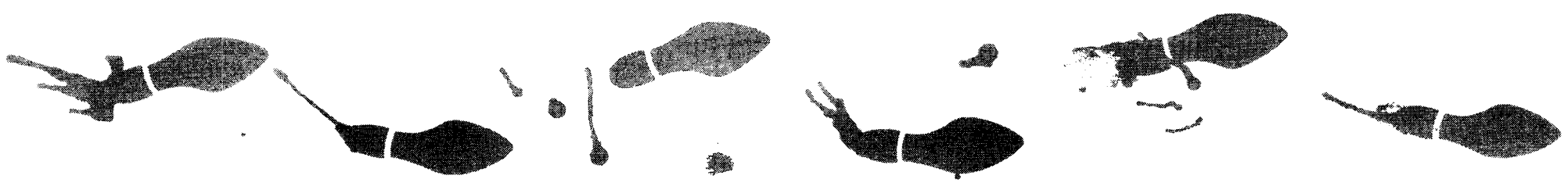
Vertac Chemical's/Jacksonville plant: The corporate maze leading out of this dioxin-laden site spans several continents.

wastes at the chemical plant and "restoration" of off-site pollution areas may cost close to \$400 million. It has detected TCDD-dioxin, a byproduct of herbicide production and the most lethal substance produced by humans, at the highest levels ever found in soil and barrels of toxic waste. Many scientists say that there is no safe human exposure level for this form of dioxin.

But Jacksonville residents were not even informed until 1979 of the pollution problems that had abounded for about 30 years. Before chemical production ceased in 1986, toxic wastes were systematically spewed into the city's waterways, sewer system and several landfills, severely contaminating the area and causing numerous health problems for local residents. During what a former plant supervisor calls "runaway chemical reactions," and an explosion in the mid-'60s, vast quantities of dioxin were released into the air.

Dozens of residents maintain that over the years they have suffered everything from miscarriages and birth defects to Sudden Infant Death syndrome and cancer. More than 100 Jacksonville residents have sued two of the three companies that since 1948 have run the chemical plant, alleging personal injury and wrongful death. Since 1986 portions of both lawsuits have been settled out of court for undisclosed sums.

The question of future liability for the con-



DIOXINVILLE III:

THE TOXIC TRAIL

tamination, however, is now tangled up in federal courts. The two companies that are supposed to share cleanup costs with government agencies are at each other's throats. Vertac Chemical, which has run the plant for the past 16 years, is suing its predecessor, Hercules, Inc., which manufactured 25 percent of the Agent Orange used to defoliate the Vietnamese jungles. Vertac is claiming that Hercules should be held responsible for all future liability. In turn, Hercules, as well as federal and state agencies, are hounding Vertac in other court proceedings.

In a seeming attempt to duck its legal obligations, Vertac last year suddenly transferred its remaining assets into a series of newly formed corporations and left Arkansas. It never informed government officials of these moves.

A friend in need: This is where Dow Chemical enters the narrative. Headquartered in Midland, Mich., with 50,000 employees worldwide, the multinational was for years Vertac's main supplier of herbicides and the formulas for them. In December 1986, two months before Vertac pulled out of Jacksonville, company officials held a series of meetings with Dow executives in Great Britain, Washington, D.C., and Michigan. At the time Vertac was feeling considerable heat from the government. Although it had ceased operations in Jacksonville in February 1986, the company was being sued by the Justice Department (on behalf of the EPA) for continuing to discharge contaminated waste water into a creek adjacent to the plant site. The department was seeking a \$10,000-a-day fine. Vertac wanted out from under—and in a complex and back-handed way, Dow was about to provide the opportunity.

Dow, which contracted trademarks and products to Vertac, privately informed its "supply partner" that the smaller company had breached one or more of their agreements. Thus, Dow declared Vertac in default, with a debt of \$5.3 million owed Dow for goods sold and delivered.

Vertac could cover the debt, but its money was tied up in a trust fund and letter of credit; the company had earlier agreed with government agencies to set aside \$11 million for initial on-site cleanup at the Jacksonville plant. After consulting with Dow, Vertac quietly established three new companies in Memphis, Tenn., where Vertac's corporate headquarters were located.

Then, on Jan. 31, 1987, Vertac President J. Randal Tomblin called representatives from the EPA, the state of Arkansas and Hercules to a meeting in Dallas. Without mentioning

Continued on next page



Former Diamond Shamrock Chief Executive Officer William Bricker: was he linked to Vertac?



On the road again: The EPA came to Jacksonville last year.

Continued from preceding page

Vertac's meetings with Dow or Vertac's newly formed companies, Tomblin said that the company could no longer meet its legal obligation to maintain the corroding waste drums in Jacksonville. He seemed to be implying that Vertac was broke.

But it wasn't. Nine days later Vertac transferred all of its assets (which it claimed were \$12.7 million) into Inter-Ag, under the umbrella of the two other newly formed companies in Memphis.

The next day Inter-Ag gave Dow Chemical nearly \$1.7 million of the money Vertac owed the chemical giant. Dow also received claim to both the interest payments from the Jacksonville cleanup trust fund and any uncontaminated equipment from the Arkansas plant. And Dow took title to the remainder of Vertac's inventory, along with all product

formulas and trademarks. This was a strange turn of events, because Dow had sold those three areas of its 2,4-D herbicide business to Vertac back in 1983.

"Evidence of fraud": What was going on? The EPA and Justice Department soon hauled Vertac into U.S. District Court in Little Rock to try to find out.

Last July Vertac's lawyers argued that the company hoped its business dealings with Dow would provide it with enough money to defray "environmental expenses." Further testimony revealed that those "expenses" were hardly "environmental." They included more than \$400,000 for upkeep of Vertac's Memphis office and about \$500,000 for "depreciation and lawyers' fees." It also came out that a Vertac employee was seen moving documents from the plant to a private storage area. Although Judge Henry Woods did

not hold Vertac in contempt of court, he ordered measures to assure no more unauthorized removal of documents.

In handing down his ruling in September 1987 Judge Woods said, "The evidence of fraud is clear and compelling. The present management of Vertac has demonstrated its willingness to manipulate numbers and corporate assets to facilitate non-performance of Vertac's environmental responsibilities under various court orders." The transfer of assets into Inter-Ag, he added, was simply "an effort to put them beyond the reach" of environmental agencies—a deal that involved "fictitious considerations" rather than fair market value.

The judge agreed with the government that the state should appoint a receiver to take over Vertac, an arrangement that he ruled would extend to Inter-Ag as well. Vertac officials are currently seeking to overturn the decision in the U.S. Court of Appeals in St. Louis.

Meanwhile, the Justice Department demanded that Dow give the EPA the money it had received from Vertac, as well as assign over to the federal government the herbicide trademarks that Vertac had returned to Dow. When Dow refused, the EPA and the Justice Department filed another suit. This time, the government said that not only Vertac's top officers and successor corporations but also Dow should be held liable for Vertac's court-ordered share of the Jacksonville cleanup costs.

Dow immediately filed a countersuit in federal court in Memphis. *Dow vs. USA* maintains that any legal proceedings should be held there, not in Little Rock. In the suit, which includes Vertac and the First Tennessee Bank (where the cleanup trust fund is administered), Dow claims it is entitled to

the net income from the trust fund as part of Vertac's remaining debt to it.

Enter the corporate maze: Why is Dow, with \$11 billion in global revenues in 1987, quibbling so vociferously over a comparatively paltry \$5.3 million? "The Vertac-Dow relationship is definitely a deep pocket to look into," says Robert Blanz, who dealt with the Vertac situation for seven years as deputy director of Arkansas' Department of Pollution Control and Ecology. "I don't think anyone understands all the dealings that went down between them. But you don't take Dow on lightly with inexperienced government lawyers, because they will come in loaded for bear."

Vertac, with its new name, Inter-Ag, continues to this day to conduct business out

The intricate maze illustrates how bigger companies use smaller ones to keep up production of lucrative, but potentially deadly, products.

of Memphis. Motions to set the trial's location are expected to be ruled on later this year. Meanwhile, under a separate ruling by Judge Woods, the government agencies have tried to collect on a \$4 million letter of credit that Vertac in 1985 agreed to set aside at a

The chronology of a toxic coverup: Dow, the EPA and dioxin

1948—Secret human health tests sponsored by Dow Chemical show that extremely low concentrations of several of its compounds, including the 2,4,5-T herbicide, are capable of producing skin rashes, acne-like effects and allergic responses. 2,4,5-T is registered as a pesticide with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

1949—The first industrial accident involving dioxin occurs at a Monsanto Chemical 2,4,5-T plant in West Virginia.

1957—Dioxin is identified by scientists as an unavoidable contaminant in 2,4,5-T.

1958—Findings point to the presence of liver damage in German chemical workers exposed to 2,4,5-T.

1962—Defoliants containing 2,4,5-T are first used in Vietnam. Dow starts making napalm, a jellied gasoline that kills in a particularly painful way, for military use in Vietnam.

1965—The Pentagon contracts with Dow and other U.S. chemical companies to manufacture Agent Orange (50 percent comprised of 2,4,5-T and 50 percent 2,4-D) for use in Vietnam. At a secret meeting at Dow's headquarters, manufacturers are told that 2,4,5-T has negative health effects.

1970—After suppressed 1966 studies are released linking 2,4,5-T to birth defects in rodents, the Pentagon suspends its use.

Dow, leading producer of the defoliant, expands 2,4,5-T use for weed control in the U.S.

1971—The newly formed Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announces cancellation of 2,4,5-T use on most food crops. But Dow wins a court injunction allowing continued manufacture. In 100 communities in Missouri, dioxin mixed with waste oil is sprayed on dirt roads to keep down dust.

1973—A Vietnamese study links higher incidences of liver cancer, spontaneous abortions and birth defects to Agent Orange.

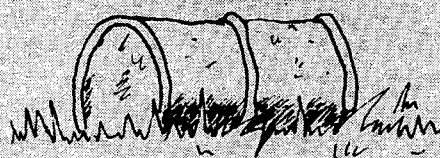
1976—An explosion at a chemical plant in Seveso, Italy, releases several pounds of dioxin in a densely populated area. Local residents are not informed for eight days, after hundreds of animals have died and hundreds of people are hospitalized. Chronic health effects ensue.

1977—Soldiers who served in Vietnam begin approaching the Veterans Administration (VA) with various health problems they believe are related to Agent Orange exposure.

1978—The EPA offers evidence based on testing of laboratory animals that 2,4,5-T and dioxin cause cancer, birth defects and fetal deaths. The Love Canal area of Niagara Falls, where 21,800 tons of chemical wastes including dioxin are buried,

is declared an emergency disaster area by President Jimmy Carter.

1979—Rural residents of western Oregon disturbed by health effects in their community win a federal lawsuit banning 2,4,5-T use by the U.S. Forest Service there, on grounds that the government had failed to consider the effects of dioxin. The EPA issues an emergency suspension of 2,4,5-T uses, with the exception of rangelands and rice fields, and establishes a "no safe level of dioxin" policy. The EPA sets up a Chlorinated Dioxins Work Group (CDWG). Vietnam veterans file a massive class-action suit against Agent Orange manufacturers, and the chemical companies name the U.S. government as a third-party defendant.



1980—The Canadian government pressures the U.S. to investigate the source of high dioxin levels found in the Great Lakes. The EPA considers Dow the chief suspect for dioxin contamination of fish downstream from its Michigan headquarters. The company issues a report suggesting that dioxins are a natural product of all combustion sources, present in the environment since "Prometheus stole fire

from the gods and brought it to mankind."

Carter's EPA waffles on its dioxin regulatory policy, fearing economic havoc when it finds that more potential sources of dioxin range from municipal incinerators to many industrial processes, including pulp and paper manufacturing.

1981—After the Reagan administration takes office, all dioxin analysis and any public release of information about dioxin is consolidated under Dr. Donald Barnes of the CDWG. The EPA reaches an agreement with Dow to recess 2,4,5-T public hearings indefinitely and conduct private negotiations with the chemical company. EPA scientists find, but do not announce, that dioxin levels in Great Lakes fish are high enough to cause significant increase in cancer rates among consumers. Rather than quarantining the fish, the Food and Drug Administration issues a watered-down "advisory" to affected states recommending limited fish consumption. A report by the EPA's Midwest regional office traces the Great Lakes dioxin to Dow's doorstep, but is substantially revised by order of Dr. Barnes and his deputy, John Hernandez. Vietnam vets file suit against the VA and Department of Defense.

1982—When a severe contamination problem in Times Beach, Mo., comes to light—resulting from the illegal disposal of dioxin-laden waste oil 11 years before—the EPA raises its "no safe level"

Swiss bank for the Jacksonville cleanup. But the bank, citing problems with certain "procedural requirements," has so far refused to turn over the money.

For now, the EPA—which spent more than \$5 million last year re-drumming leaking barrels of waste at the Jacksonville plant—and the state are left holding the bag. Under Superfund, Arkansas is supposed to provide 10 percent of the total funds to restore Jacksonville's polluted environment. But the state's economy is already one of the country's most depressed. Coming up with 10 percent of a potential \$400 million cleanup tab "might well be impossible," says Phillip Deisch, a Little Rock attorney and former counsel to Arkansas' pollution agency. "Arkansas is vitally interested in getting to the private pockets who are really responsible for this mess."

Those corporate private pockets, however, so overlap each other that proving liability may be impossible. To understand why, the origins of Vertac must be examined. The real ownership behind the company has long been a mystery. Sources in and out of the government remain reluctant to discuss what they know. Even when they were simply confirming information that *In These Times* had uncovered, many of them requested anonymity.

Who owns this firm, anyway? Vertac is an acronym for the names of four chemical companies that merged in 1976 (Vicksburg, Eagle River, Transvaal and Agricultural Chemicals). At the time, Transvaal was leasing the Jacksonville site from Hercules. Vertac, according to an ex-official, was initially set up by some former executives of Union Carbide—the chemical company responsible for the 1984 disaster in Bhopal, India. In addition to its Jacksonville operation, Vertac owned

chemical plants in West Helena, Ark., and Vicksburg, Miss. But, says the source, "the Union Carbide people did not understand that there were limits to expense accounts." In 1978 Vertac declared bankruptcy.

Not long after, the company re-emerged intact, although its new owners were unknown. They had registered Vertac under the aegis of three offshore holding companies in Panama. Says Reed Newman, a former Justice Department lawyer who investigated the company for the EPA, "Panama is somewhat of a haven for people who wish to incorporate or have a significant interest in com-

panies, but not have a lot of folks know about it in terms of [U.S. government] reporting requirements. We ran into a brick wall as far as finding out who really owned Vertac."

Over the past year or so, however, the mystery surrounding Vertac's owners has started to unravel. *In These Times* was able to trace majority ownership to a wealthy Italian named Vittorio de Nora. This was confirmed by several sources.

Now age 76 and living in Geneva, Switzerland, de Nora made his fortune in the electrochemical segment of the industry. At a Milan-based company that he and a brother

established more than 50 years ago, he pioneered in the '70s a process used in making chlorine. Chlorine is the basic building block of chlorohydrocarbon herbicides produced by both Dow and Vertac.

To protect themselves from possible patent lawsuits, the de Noras "set up companies all over the place that could be financially isolated," says Colonel Dillmore, a laboratory researcher with PPG Industries, an American company that previously worked closely with de Nora's Italian firm.

Parts of the de Nora operation were registered in Panama. "Vittorio is a man of the world," Dillmore adds. "He used to have his own private jets, and spent most of his time outside Italy. He was deeply involved with the Diamond Shamrock company, and used to own a substantial block of their stock."

The Diamond Shamrock connection:

Diamond Shamrock, for years one of America's "big five" chemical giants, was a major producer of herbicides, including Agent Orange, for the Pentagon. Vittorio de Nora's relationship with Diamond executives dates back to the '50s. By 1973 he sat on Diamond's board of directors. But because de Nora was trying to do business with competitors, fellow directors convinced him not to stand for re-election the next year.

He was a longtime friend of William Bricker, then in charge of bolstering Diamond's agricultural chemicals business. In 1976 Bricker was appointed chief executive officer of Diamond. That same year Diamond spent more than \$50 million to acquire de Nora's Electron Corporation that was registered in Panama. De Nora remained in Italy as chairman of Electron.

In later 1979, Bricker reportedly introduced de Nora to Vertac's owners and

Continued on following page

on dioxin to a one part per billion "level of concern."

1983—Attempting to defuse a mounting scandal surrounding misconduct and mismanagement at the EPA, the agency offers to buy the entire town of Times Beach and evacuate residents. John Hernandez becomes the EPA's acting administrator after the scandal forces two top officials to resign. Hernandez soon also steps down in disgrace after Congress uncovers that he had intervened personally to allow Dow to alter the draft report on Great Lakes dioxin contamination, at the same time that Dow was refusing to give the EPA information on dioxin problems at its plant. The altered report had also eliminated all risk information on dioxin-tainted fish, a damaging scientific appraisal of 2,4,5-T's health effects in Alsea, Ore., and any mention of Agent Orange. Congress appropriates \$4 million for an EPA study of dioxin nationwide.

Reagan appoints William Ruckelshaus to restore the EPA's image. Ruckelshaus calls for "risk-benefit analysis" to replace the "margin of safety" laws. Part of an EPA study showing the severity of dioxin contamination in Alsea, Ore., is released—pages that the agency had claimed to a federal court did not exist. The EPA asserts a "mix-up," maintaining that the highly contaminated samples were not really gathered in the sediments of Oregon drinking water supplies, but

inside Dow's Michigan manufacturing facility. Dow and the EPA are privately negotiating an agreement to allow wider use of 2,4,5-T, permitting resumption of some applications banned in 1979. But in the face of another potential scandal over the "mix-up," Dow and the EPA simultaneously announce the cancellation of all remaining registrations on 2,4,5-T.



1984—Interagency working groups on dioxin are now coordinated from the White House by Maj. Alvin Young, an Air Force scientist who had a key role in developing Agent Orange as a weapon. The day before the Agent Orange trial is to begin, Dow orchestrates a \$180 million out-of-court "settlement"—over the vehement objections of many veterans involved—to be paid by seven chemical companies. Thus, the manufacturers avoid a precedent-setting court decision—as well as having to reveal what they knew about Agent Orange and when. Referring to the suppressed Oregon study and to "widespread fraud" in herbicide health-testing, an appeals court judge bans federal use of all herbicides in the Alsea study area until they are adequately

tested for health effects.

1985—A veterans' attempt to sue the government over Agent Orange is initiated, but denied on grounds of federal immunity. All domestic uses of 2,4,5-T herbicides are finally outlawed by the EPA. Fish samples collected downstream from pulp and paper mills consistently reveal dioxin contamination.

1986—A new study of Missouri residents by the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reveals that exposure to relatively small amounts of dioxin in the environment appears to lead to a higher risk of immune-system damage. A privately funded medical study finds that nursing infants in the U.S. may be imbibing dioxin in mothers' breast milk at levels 1,300 times those considered acceptable by the CDC. A group of Vietnam veterans, scientists and members of Congress announce research results showing a biological "fingerprint" left in veterans' blood by dioxin.

1987—An appeals court upholds the chemical companies' settlement in the Agent Orange case. The CDC and the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment agree that no large-scale study on the effects of Agent Orange can be conducted because too few troops were actually exposed to the chemical. The Air Force announces results of a 20-year Agent Orange study that it says has failed to uncover any unusual health problems in veterans.

Over the protest of seven chemical manufacturers, the Supreme Court lets stand an appeals court order that the companies allow Vietnam veterans to see research documents on Agent Orange.

A privately funded medical study finds dioxin present in the breast milk of all 50 American mothers tested. A federal appeals court absolves Monsanto Chemical of knowingly exposing seven workers to dioxin. The paper industry reveals that traces of dioxin have been detected in a wide range of its products, but says that there is little risk to human health. The EPA announces that dioxin-contaminated soils are less prevalent than feared. The EPA unveils a new draft study sharply lowering its estimate of the cancer-causing potential of dioxin by sixteenfold. Dow Chemical, now embarked on a major advertising campaign to foster a "good-guy" image, finally shuts down the world's last 2,4,5-T production facility, in New Zealand. A Texas jury holds Dow liable for \$1.5 million in the death of a forest service worker who sprayed its 2,4-D product, on grounds that the herbicide had caused his cancer.

1988—The Supreme Court denies an effort to overturn governmental immunity in the Agent Orange litigation. Dr. Barnes, who has held control of the government's dioxin information for nine years, is promoted to chairman of the EPA's Science Advisory Board.

—D.R.

Continued from preceding page

the idea of acquiring the company. It must have seemed an attractive business opportunity to de Nora. After all, herbicides were a multimillion-dollar international business. De Nora could use his own electrochemical processes to make chlorine (which he did, especially at another Vertac outlet in Vicksburg, Miss.), and then save money by using the chlorine in his own herbicides. When he bought Vertac, Jacksonville's environmental problems had barely begun to surface.

In *These Times* could not determine whether Bricker took part ownership in Vertac, supposedly a competitor of Bricker's company, Diamond. But "if that is what happened," and if Bricker was privately involved with two competing companies, says staff attorney Robert Hausman of Trial Lawyers for Public Justice in Washington, "the lack of a technical violation of the anti-trust laws does not make it less scandalous."

This much is certain: two of Diamond's executives left the company and went to Vertac. Arne Obel, president of Bricker's International and Diversified Technology unit—which oversaw the newly acquired de Nora firm in Italy—set up the main holding company for Vertac in Panama. Obel then became Vertac's chief executive officer and was, according to company officials, "the liaison between the management and ownership" of Vertac. Ray Guidi, who had been an executive at Diamond's New Jersey chemical plant, became the Jacksonville plant's oper-

ations manager.

The relationship between Diamond's top executive Bricker and Vertac's de Nora continued over the next several years. In 1982 their companies established Eltech Systems, a new joint venture to make chlorine production equipment. Two years later Diamond sold its interest to de Nora. A Diamond attorney told *Business Week* magazine that this buyout came about because "the chemical industry was flat on its back." For a company that other sources told *Business Week* was a "guaranteed money-maker," de Nora paid \$13 million less for Eltech Systems than what Diamond thought it was worth. Bricker kept his ties to de Nora as an unpaid director of Eltech.

By 1982 de Nora's Vertac venture was already coming under heavy fire in Arkansas. The EPA was suing Hercules and Vertac, trying to force the companies to split the initial cleanup costs at the Jacksonville plant. The extent of the off-site contamination, which stretched for miles across a flood plain and onto several landfills where the companies disposed of their wastes, was beginning to be discovered. Perhaps de Nora wanted to unload a potential albatross. And Bricker seemed willing to help him out.

The puzzle widens: Diamond had undertaken with a Japanese firm another joint venture in the early '80s. The U.S.-based company was called SDS-Biotech, the initials of Showa Denko/Diamond Shamrock. Besides Vertac, SDS-Biotech was America's only

other major manufacturer of widely used 2,4-D herbicide products. At a board meeting in 1984, a source told *Business Week*, Bricker demanded that SDS-Biotech's Japanese partner either agree that SDS-Biotech buy Vertac or the partnership was over. But the Japanese refused.

Why was Bricker apparently so interested in incorporating Vertac into a subsidiary of his own company? Was he trying to corner the market on 2,4-D? Or was it part of a long-range plan to help de Nora dump Vertac one way or another? The latter seems an equally logical explanation. Shortly after the Japanese arm of SDS-Biotech turned Bricker down on Vertac, Diamond bought out the Japanese and took sole control of SDS-Biotech.

But someone else was interested in SDS-Biotech. In the fall of 1985 Bricker and de Nora travelled to Stockholm, Sweden, to meet with Refaat el-Sayed, owner of the Fermenta biotechnology company. El-Sayed had previous business relations with de Nora, dealing him Fermenta stock options in exchange for an Italian pharmaceutical company that de Nora owned. Now el-Sayed was interested in acquiring SDS-Biotech.

But according to Hans Lindberg, Sweden's chief prosecutor who later investigated the transaction, Diamond's Bricker and de Nora insisted on a "package deal." If el-Sayed wanted Diamond's subsidiary, he would have to buy Vertac as well. At the time, however, more and more of Jacksonville's environmental troubles were being uncovered. El-Sayed's

It is unclear who will eventually have to pay the cleanup costs in Jacksonville. Every company involved wants off the financial hook.

advisers "looked into Vertac," Lindberg says, "and said he should not buy the Jacksonville plant, only the other Vertac chemical companies." Otherwise the deal was off.

Trust fund set up: In October 1985 Vertac's management called a meeting with representatives of the EPA, Justice Department and Arkansas' pollution agency. "The idea, at least as it was represented to us, was that a foreign corporation had approached the board of Vertac seeking to acquire certain of its assets," says Reed Newman, then with the Justice Department. Fermenta AB was described to the officials as "a giant holding company with a multinational participation in its capitalization."

Vertac's officials told the Justice Department that the Swedish company would acquire only the plants in West Helena, Ark., and Vicksburg, Miss. It was a "spinoff" proposal, whereby "Vertac would reincorporate those other entities as Cedar Chemical, which would then be acquired by [el-Sayed's] Fermenta through a stock deal," says Newman. Vertac's owners would get a large chunk of Fermenta stock.

According to Newman, the government was concerned about whether the deal would leave Vertac with enough capital to maintain its responsibility for the Jacksonville cleanup. The government wondered whether the deal was part of a Vertac plan to walk away from Jacksonville completely. Newman says that the Justice Department considered legal action to prevent the deal, but settled instead for what appeared a legitimate resolution.

Vertac's management proposed that the owners of the company, along with the potential buyers, establish a \$7 million trust fund and an additional \$4 million letter of credit to be assigned later for specific cleanup tasks at the Jacksonville plant. Vertac was also ordered to spend a dollar on environmental cleanup for every one it spent on operations. The deal was struck and the letter of credit was drawn on a Swiss bank in the Italian language. At the time the Justice Department did not know who had approved the transaction on Vertac's behalf.

On Dec. 18, 1985, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Fermenta had purchased SDS-Biotech and a Vertac unit. Reincorporated as Cedar Chemical, the Vertac spinoff would be managed by SDS-Biotech, now owned by el-Sayed.

A shutdown and a scandal: Two months later Vertac shut down its Jacksonville plant. This move coincided with an announcement by Arkansas environmental of-



Taking soil samples in Jacksonville: the city's pollution woes are worse than New York's Love Canal.

Jacksonville News

officials that the company was being fined \$40,500 for violations of a 1982 court-ordered cleanup decree. Vertac, the state claimed, was still discharging levels of chemicals up to 10 times the allowable level into adjacent Rocky Branch Creek. The company was not reporting monitoring of these chemicals as required, and was also violating barrel storage requirements.

On Feb. 28, 1986, Vertac laid off 50 of its 80 Jacksonville employees, keeping the rest, it claimed, to start cleanup at the plant. Four days later, the company settled out of court with 71 nearby residents who had filed suit against it. Details of the settlement were not revealed. That same week Diamond announced plans to sell its \$820-million-a-year chemical division to Occidental Petroleum.

De Nora had come out of the SDS-Biotech/Vertac deal with \$44 million in cash and \$30 million in Fermenta stock. He had also unloaded most of Vertac, including other plants besides Jacksonville that had potential environmental liabilities.

Meanwhile, the Swedish government had launched an investigation of Fermenta's corporate dealings. The resulting scandal, one of Sweden's biggest in years, led to Fermenta's expulsion from the Swedish stock exchange and el-Sayed's resignation as chairman of the company's board.

Swedish prosecutor Lindberg did not bring any indictments in the affair. But he told *In These Times* that he believes the SDS-Biotech/Vertac deal may have involved millions of dollars' in stock kickbacks from de Nora to el-Sayed. Could those kickbacks have been compensation for el-Sayed taking most of Vertac off de Nora's hands?

Following the scandal in Sweden, Fermenta's stock value dropped by 90 percent. With de Nora's investment in Fermenta nearly wiped out, and \$11 million of Vertac's money bottled up in the Jacksonville cleanup trust fund and letter of credit, he needed a way out of the Jacksonville imbroglio more than ever.

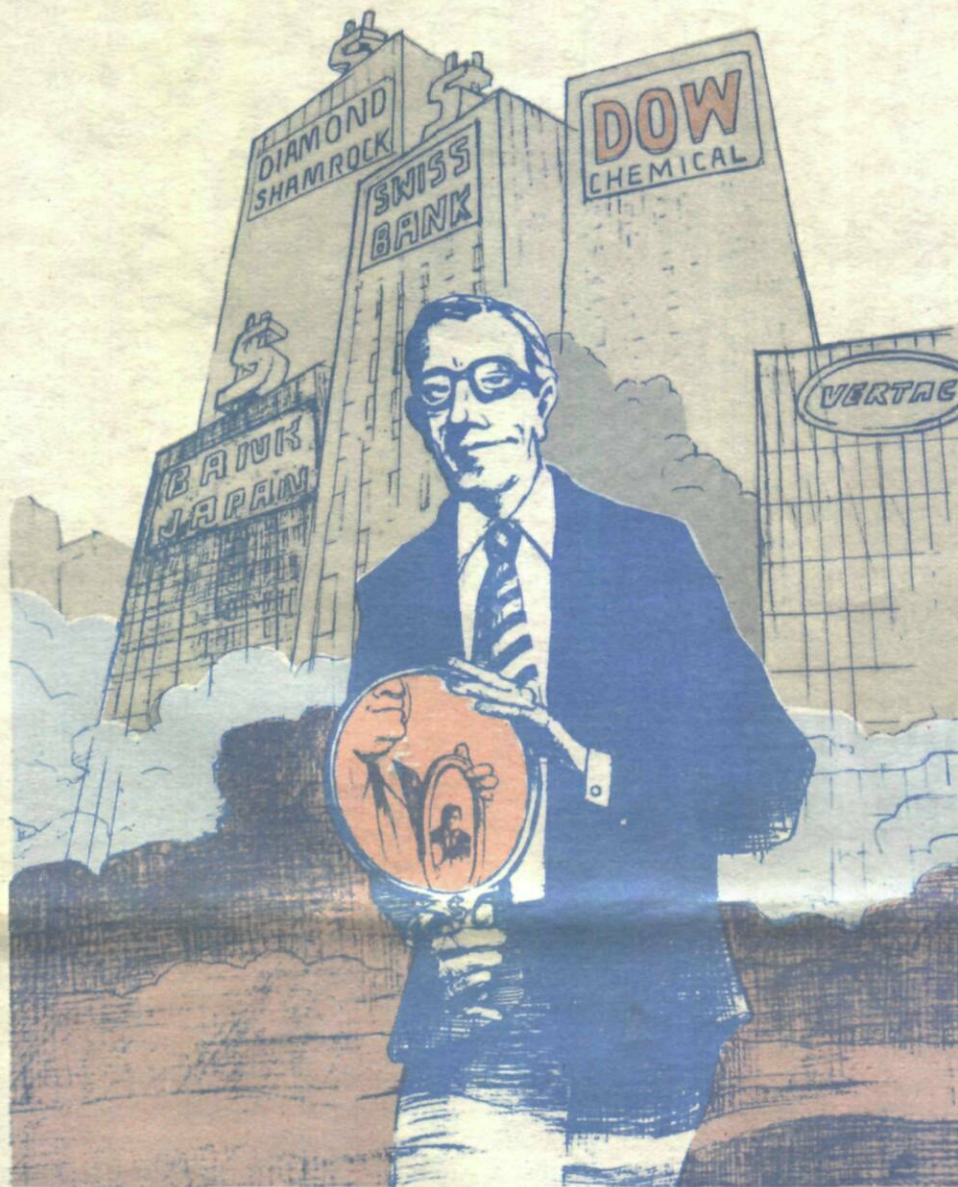
A backroom deal? Late in 1986, a year after de Nora sold most of Vertac to Fermenta, Dow suddenly called in its chips on Vertac's debt for its herbicide supply contracts. The question that arises through *In These Times*' probe of the various corporate maneuvering is this: did de Nora, or perhaps Bricker, work out a behind-the-scenes deal with Dow—allowing Vertac to use the debt payment as an excuse to transfer all of its assets into Inter-Ag and bolt from Jacksonville?

In These Times was unable to determine the extent of de Nora and Bricker's possible involvement in the Vertac-Dow dealings. Neither could be reached for comment.

But *In These Times* did trace a probable de Nora connection to Dow. The chemical giant was—and still is—involved in a joint venture with the Italian electrochemical company that de Nora originally formed with his brother Oronzio. Bricker, as head of a major chemical company like Diamond, was also likely acquainted with Dow executives.

In an unrelated incident, Bricker was forced to step down at Diamond in December 1986. He reportedly had been under pressure from Diamond's board for alleged misuse of company funds.

In telephone interviews with *In These Times*, Justice Department investigators refused to comment on their probe of Vertac's



ties to Bricker and Diamond. But if Bricker was aware of a government examination of his relationship to de Nora—and his own possible liability for the Jacksonville cleanup—it may have seemed a sensible idea to help unload what was left of Vertac.

The links between Dow and Vertac have always been curious. They can be traced to 1978, when Vertac was brought out of bankruptcy by de Nora and Diamond executives. In retrospect, it appears that Dow was using the smaller company as a kind of "shell" to handle some of Dow's more controversial products. On paper, the two companies were competitors. Both, for example, made substantial quantities of 2,4-D herbicides—which recent studies have linked to cancer. But even though Dow continued to manufacture 2,4-D, it sold in 1983 all of its registration rights, inventories, formulation recipes and marketing data to Vertac.

"Dow knew 2,4-D was a dirty business, with a lot of environmental hazards associated," says Vertac's former publicist David Simmons. "So they wanted Vertac to take front-line responsibility for it."

About the same time, Vertac received permission from the EPA to put some wastes that were classified as containing TCDD-dioxin back into its 2,4-D products. Some of these wastes may have come directly from Dow.

"Among Dow employees," says Paul Merrell, co-author of a report on dioxin pollution

published by Greenpeace, "the scuttlebutt was that part of its dealings with Vertac involved transferring a bunch of Dow's 2,4,5-T [dioxin] waste to the Jacksonville plant."

The herbicide supply contract between Dow and Vertac has now been terminated, according to Vertac officials. Although Judge Woods found "clear and compelling evidence" of fraud in Vertac's transfer of assets into Inter-Ag, it remains an open question whether the company's move was part of a scheme between Vertac's owners and Dow Chemical. That question is, perhaps by design, now mired in the federal courts.

Passing the buck: A different court proceeding, however, may answer some other lingering questions.

Dow, along with Vertac and its Jacksonville predecessor Hercules, was named in a lawsuit filed by 183 former workers at the chemical plant and their families. They maintain that Dow, through its ongoing supply of herbicides to Vertac despite full knowledge of their potentially detrimental effects, shares the guilt for health problems that the workers have suffered. In the legal dispute over cleanup obligations among the chemical companies, Vertac is now pitted against Hercules.

Last June Vertac petitioned the court that Hercules should be held responsible for all future Jacksonville cleanup liability because no dioxin contamination was disclosed back

when the plant changed hands. It was, Vertac's lawyers said, "a deliberate transfer of technology" that resulted in "continuing the manufacturing and waste disposal methods practiced by Hercules, with no disclosure by Hercules of the associated hazards and risks."

While this may seem a ludicrous exercise in buck-passing, the fact remains that the courts found Hercules, along with Vertac, equally liable for the Jacksonville cleanup. Back in 1965, at a secret meeting called by Dow Chemical at its Michigan headquarters, Hercules, Diamond Shamrock and other chemical companies learned that the Agent Orange ingredient 2,4,5-T caused adverse health effects. Dow and Hercules, using different competing formulas, then attempted to remove dioxin from the finished Agent Orange, resulting in a relatively "clean" product. Both were fairly successful in getting rid of the impurities, but in Hercules' Jacksonville operation this process left behind about three tons a week of the highly concentrated dioxin wastes.

These wastes were then placed in 55-gallon drums at the Jacksonville plant. According to former plant workers who have testified under oath, Hercules' dioxin-filled drums were either buried in unlined pits at the plant site or carted to a nearby city dump, where unwitting residents sometimes bought them from the dump's manager to burn trash in. Some of the Agent Orange waste was simply hosed into Rocky Branch Creek, which ran into a neighborhood to the south.

Then, after the Pentagon's suspension of its Agent Orange contracts and with the controversy over 2,4,5-T mounting, Hercules decided in 1971 to move on to other ventures. Today, the company is a major aerospace contractor with 26,000 employees, headquartered in Wilmington, Del.

But the Jacksonville plant still technically belonged to Hercules until 1976, although from 1971 to 1976 it was under lease to Transvaal, Inc. Transvaal then merged into Vertac, which took over the site later that year.

Vertac attorney Rick Beard recently testified in federal court that Transvaal had in the early '70s discovered dioxin on the site and reported it to the EPA and Arkansas officials. Some wastes containing dioxin were then taken at a cost to the company of \$250,000 to "a place approved by the government," according to Beard.

A Herculean dilemma: But whether Hercules, as Vertac alleges in its lawsuit, is more culpable than Vertac for the Jacksonville mess is not really the point. The fact is, everyone involved wants off the financial hook.

So Vertac is suing Hercules, the state and federal governments are suing Vertac and Hercules, Dow is suing the government and Vertac, and Vertac's promised letter of credit for cleanup costs is still being held by the Swiss bank. While all this is going on, the EPA and the state—if they can retrieve the court-ordered cleanup funds—are planning to go ahead with a controversial plan to incinerate the Jacksonville wastes at the plant site (see *In These Times*, March 16).

Thus, no one currently knows for sure who will bear the Jacksonville cleanup burden. In Vertac's case, the law is unclear about

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EDITORIAL

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'ONE LAST REQUEST... I WANT YOU GUYS IN CONGRESS TO GET OUT THERE AND KILL ONE MORE COMMIE FOR THE GIPPER.'

Reagan manufactures another Nicaraguan crisis

In a desperate attempt to save his campaign to overthrow the government of Nicaragua by force and violence, Ronald Reagan charged last week that the Sandinistas had invaded Honduras. To stop this "act of aggression," Reagan sent 3,200 airborne troops to Honduras—allegedly at the request of that country's president. As we went to press it wasn't clear whether or not Nicaraguan troops had in fact crossed the Honduran border. "No one has any real facts," an administration official admitted. "There is no real hard intelligence on what's happening. By the time anyone finds out what's really going on, it will probably be all over."

The Hondurans did not feel threatened. There are no Honduran troops in the border area where the fighting occurred, and a foreign ministry official said last Wednesday that he had "absolutely no information about any request" by his government for U.S. military assistance, though the administration later extracted a request, as they had also done in 1986. Democrats in Congress who had recently voted against further military aid to the contras were skeptical. As Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT) observed, every time a vote on contra aid has been imminent, or lost, the administration has manufactured

a crisis designed to stampede timid legislators into continued support for its dirty war. Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA) noted that "this is not the first time the president has made use of his military authority after he lost a vote on the contras.... It is an irresponsible involvement of American troops in the conflict in Central America and an unwise escalation of tension."

There have been many incursions into Honduras by Nicaraguan troops in hot pursuit of contras retreating into their sanctuary across the border. But because Honduras officially denies the existence of contra bases on its territory, it has objected only when pressured to do so by the Reagan administration, and even then mildly. Now, of course, the existence of the bases is especially embarrassing—or should be—because they are in blatant violation of the Arias plan, and of Honduran assurances at the January meeting of Central American presidents that such bases would no longer be tolerated. That is why they were moved late last year to the Bocay region, a remote roadless area surrounded by dense jungle.

For the administration, however, these are mere technicalities. From its inception, Reagan has done everything he could to obstruct the Central American peace process, and the fact that it is the Hondurans, not the Nicaraguans, who are violating it is irrelevant. But Democrats opposed to further contra aid should not allow this latest administration ploy to succeed. They should insist that the troops be withdrawn, and that Honduras end its complicity in the contra war by shutting down their operations in its territory.

The people of Budapest are trying one more time

On Tuesday, March 15, 10,000 people shouting "democracy" and demanding political freedoms marched through the streets of Budapest to mark the 140th anniversary of the day when the poet Sandor Petofi launched Hungary's rebellion against Austrian rule. It was the biggest anti-government demonstration since 1956, when a democratic uprising was crushed by Soviet troops, much as the 1848 rebellion had been put down with the help of the Russian czar.

As the second open expression of dissent in two years that authorities have tolerated, last week's demonstrators cheered dissident philosopher Gaspar Miklos as he told the crowd in Parliament Square that in 1848, 1918 and 1956, the Hungarian people had "tried to achieve the aims of freedom, equality, independence and a place in the community of civilized nations," but that they "are still far from these aims." How far was demonstrated that same day. In a series of dawn raids the government arrested several opposition publishers and writers in an apparent attempt to scare people away from the demonstration.

Hungary is the Eastern European country with the greatest degree of economic freedom—won as a means of pacifying the population after the revolution of 1956 was drowned in blood. But like its neighbors, it is allowed few political rights. This year's demonstration, like the revolution in 1956 that brought Imre Nagy briefly to power, follows a signal from Moscow that things are loosening up. In 1956 it was Nikita Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalin to the Soviet Communist Party's 20th Congress. This year it is Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost*. Then, Khrushchev's speech catalyzed a movement for national independence and political democracy that gave rise to the hope that Hungary—in Joseph Szilagyi's words—might become "the first and only socialist democratic state in the world." But the Soviet leaders would not tolerate either democracy or the withdrawal of Soviet troops. They feared the first would subvert their own system, and the second threatened their sense of security.

It is too early to tell whether this new movement will grow to the proportions of 1956, or—if it does—whether the Hungarian people will be permitted to determine their own fate. The Janos Kadar regime—installed by the Soviets after the Red Army did its dirty work—will do all it can to prevent a recurrence of 1956. But the people of Hungary defeated a more powerful and oppressive regime then. If they do it again, Gorbachev will be faced with the ultimate test of *glasnost*.

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In These Times believes that to guarantee our life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, Americans must take greater control over our nation's basic economic and foreign policy decisions. We believe in a socialism that fulfills rather than subverts the promise of American democracy, where social needs and rationality, not corporate profit and greed, are the operative principles. Our pages are open to a wide range of views, socialist and non-socialist, liberal and conservative. Except for editorial statements appearing on the editorial page, opinions expressed in columns and in feature or news stories are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the editors. We welcome comments and opinion pieces from our readers.

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LETTERS

Faith

THANKS FOR JOEL MILLMAN'S "NICARAGUA'S SOCIAL revolution and Christian base communities" (*ITT*, Feb. 24).

I am a Catholic priest, now in my 70s, who has travelled extensively in Latin America for the past 25 years and has read extensively in fields such as the sociology and religion of Latin America. Millman's article puts into proper perspective what I have been thinking for many years.

Two years ago I travelled to Nicaragua with a Witness to Peace delegation. I thought I was going there to help the poor farmers in a *cooperativo*. What happened was this: they helped me to understand Christianity, to bury hatred, to learn how to love my enemies and to do good to those who may harm me.

The bishop of Jinotega prohibited me from celebrating mass because of his own intransigence and paranoia. The people in the small *comunidad de base* in which I lived for a week accepted me with love. In our prayers together they prayed for their bishop; they prayed for their pesty torturers, the *contras*; they prayed for President Reagan!

I would take Millman's thesis even one step further than he does in his article. I firmly believe that the type of theology and the type of love that inspires the Christianity of the base communities in Latin America will, some day, spread to North America to enliven our Christianity and faith.

Rev. Thomas E. Lacey
St. Matthias Church
Redwood City, Calif.

Tribalism

IT SADDENS ME THAT YOU HAVE BURIED THE PALESTinian uprising more deeply than the Israeli soldiers who recently tried and failed. Though you take politically correct stands in your editorials, your hearts are obviously not into any exposure of the Jewish homeland. Otherwise the brutality of the Israeli military in the occupied *bantustans* would somehow intrude into your news coverage and analysis.

I have waited in vain since the "intifadeh" broke out on December 9, 1987, for you to feature, at least once, the story that has been brewing since the occupation began. Clearly tribalism has won out over socialist internationalism, shortsighted self-interest over compassion.

Whose side are you on, I must regretfully ask: that of the victims or that of the executioners? Of the still colonizing West or of the Third World oppressed? Your virtual blackout of the Mideast over the last dozen crucial weeks betrays your fear and prejudice, reiterated by a refusal to support the only credible presidential choice, Jesse Jackson, whom even the Democratic Socialists of America are backing.

Were it not for the dispatches of Diana Johnstone, certainly the finest foreign correspondent writing for the U.S. press today, I should cease subscribing to your tired excuse for an independent socialist alternative.

Shame on you.

Garrett Lambrev
Oakland, Calif.

Exemplified

PLEASE CANCEL MY SUBSCRIPTION. I RESENT YOUR anti-Israel position. How can there be the first step to negotiate with a party (PLO) that doesn't even recognize you?

Israel is a tiny country—Jordan is huge, and refused to take the Palestinians in when the state was made.

What about the rock-throwing and fires? The violence from the PLO you don't mention!

I am an old "progressive" who belonged to the American Labor Party in New York. I am ashamed of your paper now.

Name withheld

Standard liberal reformism

JEFF ALSON (*ITT*, FEB. 17) THINKS "IT IS APPARENT" that the primary reason why many progressives remain ambivalent toward [Jesse] Jackson's candidacy is the perception that he cannot win. That is definitely not the reason why the Socialist Party USA is not supporting Jackson, and instead is running the only democratic socialist in the campaign—Willa Kenoyer for president and Ron Ehrenreich for vice president.

Maybe Jackson can win. But the point for us is, how do you advance democratic socialism in America? If you think that this can be done without running openly democratic socialist candidates on explicitly socialist platforms, you are deluding yourself. If you think that by running a liberal, even a left-liberal like Jackson, that anything more than liberalism will be advanced, you are kidding yourself. If you think that Jackson is a "social democrat" or that somehow by supporting him that social ownership and workers' control of the economy are going to be popularized rather than standard liberal capitalist reformism, you are fooling yourself. Moreover, you are failing to do anything concretely to advance democratic socialism, but rather are fostering reform capitalism.

Maybe all that you want to do is advance liberalism and reform capitalism. That's fine, but don't go confusing that with the serious and difficult work of building a democratic socialist movement, which, among other things, means running candidates who are going to actually talk about instead of attack socialism. Rev. Jackson and Operation PUSH have never been about socialism, but rather about black capitalism and liberal reformism.

Donald F. Busky
Philadelphia

Totality

IN A RESPONSE TO LETTERS (FEB. 17), IN THESE TIMES I asserted that the United States is a "democracy" and that "anyone" who thinks otherwise is "living in a dream world—or has a definition of democracy so abstract and absolute as to be meaningless." *ITT*

also asserted that its "standard of democracy means little or nothing to most Nicaraguans." Readers were thus left to guess whether *ITT* respects Nicaraguan democracy as Nicaraguans understand it or whether *ITT* rejects Nicaraguan "democracy" as falling short of the American "standard."

Moreover, it is difficult to reconcile *ITT*'s simultaneous assertions that the United States is a "democracy" but that its citizens are "ruled by a corporate oligarchy." If this were "democracy," the masses would clamor for less democracy and elites for more democracy.

Apparently *ITT* cannot distinguish a democracy from other political systems. *ITT* says that "under our constitutional system the population must be persuaded" and that to be re-elected politicians "cannot totally ignore public opinion." But no regime, with or without a constitution, can govern without "persuading" a significant segment of the "population." Not Somoza's, not Ortega's, not Reagan's, not Gorbachov's. Nor can any regime "totally ignore public opinion" if it is to survive. Not Somoza's, not Ortega's, not Reagan's, not Gorbachov's.

The avowed purpose of *ITT*'s defense of the "formally democratic" American regime is to keep the left "in tune" with the "American people" so the left can "contest for power." Fortunately, the democratic left can struggle for power without accepting a definition of "democracy" that includes rule by a "corporate oligarchy." In fact, it is just such an overly inclusive definition of democracy that the left must contest.

Eric Schnauffer
Ann Arbor, MI

Editor's note: There's nothing to guess. It's not our job to sit in judgment of Nicaragua's form of government. Nicaragua's standard of democracy is Nicaragua's business, not the United States'. True, no regime can survive indefinitely without the acquiescence of the majority of the population. In a democracy, however, the people have a recognized right to free speech, a free press and participation in the electoral process on a formally equal basis. We can overthrow our government without resorting to revolution.

Relevant but unknown

WHO HASN'T PICKED UP A BOOK HE/SHE couldn't understand? Not I. As it happens, Marxist scholars are far less guilty of using an impenetrable jargon than their non-Marxist colleagues. For such a learned Marxist scholar as James Weinstein to think otherwise (review of Russell Jacoby's *The*

Last Intellectuals, *ITT*, Feb. 17) shows how little is known about the great number of high quality, politically relevant and generally well-written Marxist works that are being produced throughout the academy. Don't take my word for it.

Take a look at *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship on American Campuses*, vols. I, II and III, edited by Ed Vernoff and myself, which surveys the research of Marxist scholars in 23 different disciplines. The most striking conclusion that emerged from our efforts is just how much good Marxist scholarship there is (yes, in the very sense that Weinstein means it).

The second most striking conclusion was just how little of it is known, even among people who have contributed to it. Forging the weapons of criticism is a necessary and ongoing task in the class struggle, both inside the universities and out. But succeeding at what we still have to do requires that we have a better understanding of what has already been done.

Bertell Ollman
Dept. of Politics
New York University

By the book

YES, WE HAVE A FORM OF DEMOCRACY IN THE U.S. Americans established a bourgeois republic 200 years ago.

But let's ask the real questions. Democracy for whom? Freedom of assembly? Who owns the meeting hall?

Class-divided society is a power vacuum. To abolish capitalist rule, the working class must seize power or lose it. To speak of democracy out of this context is to equate it with the status quo. Socialist democracy is a new type—workers' democracy.

Tim Mills
Belvidere, IL

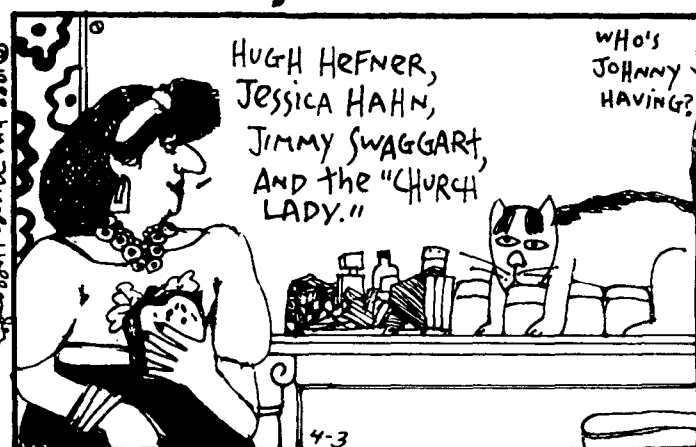
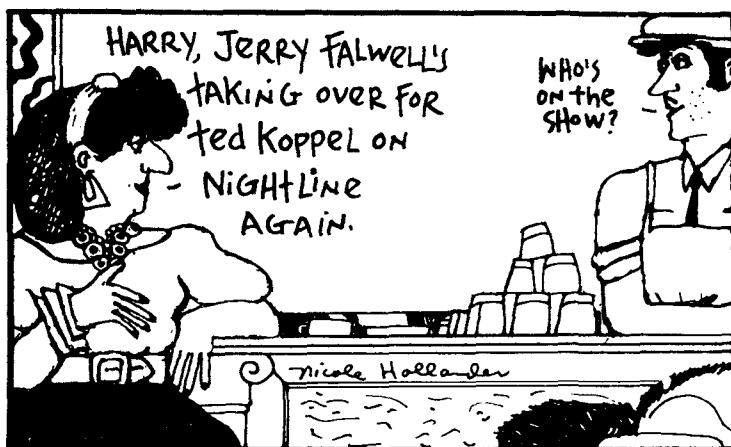
Unskilled teachers?

SINCE WHEN IS IT A BAD THING TO PAY PROFESSORS less than skilled workers? If Polish academics are so unhappy with this state of affairs, (*ITT*, Jan. 20) why don't they leave the universities and find work in the shipyards?

Ken Lawrence
Jackson, Miss.

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you want to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

SYLVIA



By Bud Kenworthy

THE DEFEAT OF THE PRESIDENT'S CONTRA aid bill in the House on the heels of the successful Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) negotiations between the superpowers provides a moment of satisfaction for those who labored hard and long in these vineyards. While savoring this moment, left organizers might step back from the fray and think about the underlying issues that shape progressive work in the United States. One such issue is unity. With the exception of transitory—and even then tense—collaboration during national demonstrations, the “peace” and “solidarity” movements pretty much have gone their separate ways. There seems little point in closer collaboration for the sake of abstract “unity.” Are there other reasons?

In a recent issue of *Nuclear Times*, Robert Schaeffer interviewed peace activists about the Central American campaign. Most saw the two issues as “distinct” or “tangential” and more than a few expressed concern that Central America might rob their cause of scarce resources. Organizations open to working on both fronts usually do so as a hedge. Schaeffer quotes an American Friends Service Committee activist, for instance, as saying “you don’t put all your organizational eggs in one basket.” Schaeffer’s own metaphor, summarized in his call for a diversified “movement portfolio,” echoes this theme.

This is not to say that those working on one front do not wish those working on another well, or that we are short on theoreticians capable of tracing connections between the two. To the Institute for Policy Studies’ Michael Klare, for one, “deadly connections” link Central America to the danger of nuclear war between the superpowers. Viewing Central America as a test case for Washington’s post-Vietnam interventions, Klare argues that if the Reagan administration “succeeds” there, this or future administrations would be tempted to repeat that “success” elsewhere, including the very region that brought the world to a nuclear alert during the Nixon administration. (Unbeknown to most Americans, during the 1973 Mideast crisis Soviet airborne troops were sent aloft while U.S.’s Strategic Air Command went on full alert.) World War I is, of course, the classic example of peripheral countries triggering a deadly confrontation among major powers.

Commonality: Are there, however, connections that don’t require the two movements agreeing on a theoretical map of the world situation? For if experience tells us anything, it is that theorizing divides left coalitions more often than it unites them. Are there commonalities that emerge from the experience of those who grapple with the realities of American power? I think so, and I think that this is an opportune moment for taking a close look at one of them: anti-communism.

Anyone who follows administration rhetoric, congressional debates, and public opinion polls realizes that anti-communism is the lodestone of both elite and public attitudes toward all foreign affairs. I would argue that anti-communism is the sea in which all progressive movements swim—against the current. It hobbles the left’s work and confines our victories to tactical, rear-guard operations that must be re-



The anti-communist scourge

peated over and over again to keep the demons at bay. Whether the demons be imperialism or nuclearism matters little when anti-communism keeps all demons healthy.

By anti-communism I mean the scarcely articulate, deeply visceral predilection that turns up in public opinion polls. During a 1987 Gallup poll, a representative sample of American adults was asked to respond to 16 political identities, using a scale on which 1 stood for no identification while 10 meant complete identification. To “anti-communist” 70 percent responded at the 8 or higher level. At that level all other identifications received less than 50 percent response. That is, there is no majority that feels as intensely about any other identity. (A majority of those polled believe that “communist countries” are responsible for unrest in the U.S. as well as in the world at large.) Broadening identity to the 6 to 10 level—now including some identification as well as strong identification—we discover a public in which 78 percent are anti-communist while 65 percent support peace. In short, they are the same people, which is not surprising, given that from time immemorial Americans have been told that anti-communism serves peace.

In this country more than products are sold by advertising. We may have grown inured to the “selling” of candidates—now a \$100 million business employing 50,000 professionals—but little attention is paid to the selling of policies, including foreign policies, by those candidates once in office. Anti-communism continues to be a hot seller; it is reinforced daily. Elite manipulation of public fears, when combined with the public’s addiction to panaceas, holds all progressive movements in thrall. Anti-communism is the controlled climate in which all activists work, adjusting their goals downward as a result. It is the palpable issue we have in common.

Debilitating discourse: Consider for a moment how this pervasive anti-communism makes it difficult to achieve peace in Central America, in U.S.-Soviet relations—anywhere. Where you start is immaterial, for all paths lead to the same conclusion: the need to replace the manipulative, emotional public discourse that links “Marxist” and “revolutionary” to “Soviet” and all three to “threat” with a discourse in which all such links must be proven, not

assumed. Let’s begin with Central America, where one of Reagan’s principal charges against the Sandinistas continues to be their role in facilitating a “communist” takeover of all Central America, threatening “our own southern border.”

Quoting from the president: “a faraway totalitarian power has committed enormous resources to change the strategic balance of the world by turning Central America into a string of anti-American, Soviet-styled dictatorships.” “Nicaragua is literally already a satellite of the communist bloc.” We are all familiar with this rhetoric by now. What is notable is how it survives the Reagan-Gorbachov summit in which the Soviet leader told the U.S. president what U.S. intelligence has known for some time: that the Soviet commitment to the Sandinistas is both limited and declining.

Ideological cover: The president repeatedly plays upon the U.S. public’s naive association of revolutionary Marxism in the Third World with Soviet “expansionism.” As the administration carried out a disinformation campaign to link Islamic terrorism to the Soviet Union, so it mounted an equally deliberate attempt to replace “leftist guerrilla” in the public lexicon for Central America with “terrorist.” Soviet, Libyan, Iranian and Nicaraguan: in Reagan rhetoric all these identities fuse into a single, global threat. From the Reagan primetime television speech preceding Congress’ caving in on the contra issue in 1986: “The Soviets have made their decision—to support the [Nicaraguan] communists. Fidel Castro has made his decision—to support the communists. Khadafy, Arafat and the Ayatollah Khomeini have made their decision—to support the communists. Now, we must make our decision. Will we permit the Soviet Union to put a second Cuba, a second Libya, right on the doorstep of the United States?”

Tarring the Sandinistas with the Soviet brush is, of course, a repeat of what the Nixon administration did to Salvador Allende in Chile—or should I say did to the American public. It worked then and it works now. Almost no Democrats in Congress, including such pro-peace liberals as Rep. David Obey (D-WI) and Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT), seem willing to challenge the framing assumption that, in “our” hemisphere, Marxism simply has no place.

How have most activists dealt with this?

In opposing contra aid, activists largely have conceded the Marxism issue. In the early years many even tried to conceal the Sandinistas’ Marxism. Today they rally public opposition to contra aid by mining the other deep vein in the American political subconscious: isolationism. Nationwide organizations such as Countdown ’87, Neighbor to Neighbor and Citizens Action portray Central America as “another Vietnam,” a “quagmire” in which U.S. lives and dollars will be lost with nothing to show for it. Better the money be spent at home. To defeat contra aid, such campaigns stoke the public’s “strong aversion to the region that goes from misinformation to racism.” That’s the conclusion of liberal pollster Stanley Greenberg as interviewed by *In These Times* (Sept. 2).

The messages to activists on Central America, then, is clear: either confront the anti-communism issue—which is the Soviet threat issue, which is a peace movement issue—or run the risk implicit in relying on isolationism. Isolationism is about costs, not about goals. It provides no inoculation against Grenada-type operations carried out by U.S. forces or against situation where U.S. surrogates prove more effective than the contras have been (for example, the Guatemalan army). It provides no footing from which to mount an attack on Washington’s economic embargo of Nicaragua. Revolutionary Marxism in the Third World has to be detached in the public’s understanding from Soviet satellite or else the Allendes and the Sandinistas will be saved from one kind of U.S. intervention only to face another.

To those focused on U.S.-Soviet relations and the threat of nuclear war, I would point out that “Central America” (in quotes to signify the administration’s advertisement, not the reality) is what keeps the public’s sense of being threatened by the Soviets alive at a time when Gorbachov’s initiatives and Reagan’s desire for an arms treaty might otherwise undermine that sense of threat. While Reagan says it’s all right to trust the Kremlin on INF, notice how he continues to feed the spectre of an “evil empire” by not changing his rhetoric on Soviet “imperialism” in the Third World. Thus the deep well of the public’s anti-communism is kept full—ready for the day when this or another president wants to fan anti-Soviet animosity to jack up the arms race.

It is not just the perception that the Soviets have dangerous weapons aimed at us but the perception that “they” are everywhere, including in “our own backyard,” that keeps the public voting for representatives who in turn vote for escalations of the arms race. Our common goal—a peace that permits social and economic justice—requires a common effort to defuse the visceral, indiscriminate anti-communism rampant in the American public. Helping the public see the distinctions that exist in the real world won’t be easy inasmuch as Americans have no memory of Marxism playing a constructive role in their own history. But playing isolationism off anti-communism is a risky substitute. Victories on immediate issues will prove ephemeral unless and until we make a dent in this meta-issue.

Bud Kenworthy frequently writes on U.S. policy toward Latin America.

By Peter Karman

SOME PEOPLE ARE ANTICOMMUNIST THE way other people are Trekkies. They find their ecstasy in the endless regurgitation of souvenirs. For Trekkies, the enthusiasts of the TV show *Star Trek*, that means the blather and baubles of Capt. Kirk and the crew of the starship Enterprise. For Bolshie-bashers like Joshua Muravchik, author of *What Is To Be Done?* (A guide for anticommunists) in the *New Republic* (Nov. 30, 1987), it consists of treasuring the tropes of the '50s heyday of Red-baiting.

Enthusiast Muravchik's plea is that we "restore the term 'communist' as a category in our political discourse." Ruefully noting that the A-list of certifiable U.S. communists begins and ends with the name Gus Hall, he wants to stick the Red and or pro-Red label on the "category [that] include[s] groups such as the Institute for Policy Studies, various agencies of the National Council of Churches, Ed Asner and other Hollywood stars and several members of Congress." His purpose, he says, is not to surveil or jail these folks, but to "discredit them" so "that their counsels deserve no weight."

The good old daze: Like a Trekkie, Muravchik lives on memories. He harkens back to the time when the word communist was a paralyzing pejorative, the verbal equivalent of a phaser set on stun. Merely to aim it at your political opponent was to abort the argument in triumph. How much more difficult, if not to say impossible, debate is for rightists when substance is not so handily subdued. Muravchik is stuck in a time warp, oblivious to the onward march of rhetoric.

"Communism" stopped being the equivalent of "boo" back on Feb. 20, 1972, when President Nixon toasted the ultimate godless atheist, Chairman Mao. With the majority of the world's commies, including those who had been ranked by the right as the most ruthlessly fanatic of all, suddenly on our side against the Soviets, the stark specter of collectivism begat the complexity that American politicians abhor. Communism gradually degenerated from a terror term to a mushy negative. Like "white-collar crime" or "the drug problem," it became an evil mitigated by the knowledge that some of our pals partook in the practice.

Here, by the way, lies one of the great examples of malleability of the national mindset. It will be remembered that previous to Nixon's trip, the received wisdom was that while the Soviets merely wanted to take over the world to fulfill the dogmas of Marx and Lenin, the Chinese communists positively *had* to swallow the globe to feed their rabid population of brainwashers and blue ants. It may also be recalled that we dispatched a half million troops to Vietnam ostensibly to muzzle Beijing. In any case, communist Chinese "expansionism" evaporated during the soup course at the state dinner for Nixon, never to be mentioned again by those who had so ardently warned about it for the previous two decades. The night sweats of our right-wing friends and the defense contractors for whom they still are occasioned by the horrible premonition that the Soviet menace will not survive Reagan's rapprochement with the Russkies.

Vain search: Ever since the term "communist" lost its former firepower, our lead-

Bolshie-bashers are trying to revive a paralyzing pejorative



Scott Van Ossel

ers have been fitfully fishing for a substitute swear word that could keep us emptying our brains and wallets in the dead drop of national security. In particular, they wanted a generic fright-phrase that could muffle our increasingly chaotic nightmares.

America's defeat in Vietnam had exactly the disastrous result that the right had predicted, only worse. It demonstrated to Red revolutionaries—and everyone else as well—that Uncle Sap was vulnerable. We woke from our Saigon bummer to find a world full of rival capitalisms, threateningly anti-materialistic religious movements and myriad un-American and therefore subversive nationalisms. We were appalled to discover ungrateful foreigners acting in their own best interests instead of ours.

Our grand mission, in that phrase of Dean Acheson, to grab hold of history and make it conform, had fizzled and with it our hegemonic hiatus. But then we have no business with history anyway; we're Americans.

In any case, "terrorism" appeared to fit the need once met by "communism." It seemed a perfect panoramic pejorative for all those disparate states and sects, refractory or reactionary, daring to resist the call by God and Randy Newman that the world become just another American town.

However, it quickly became clear that "terrorism" was much too graphic and specific a word for unsubtle and practical America. It conjured up not the desired

tingo-macho reaction but rather consumer concern about airline service. "Terrorism" became a horror on a par with lost baggage or being stuck in Denver during a snowstorm. You could save yourself from communism only by paying trillions to the Pentagon, but terrorism was easily enough avoided by buying the Hawaiian instead of the European package tour.

Moreover, our commercial military has a quite understandable aversion to threats that can be dealt with on the cheap. It being nigh impossible to dream up multibillion weapons systems to deter terrorism, that particular menace has received Pentagon priority on a par with the danger of subversion from Suriname.

The terror syndrome: Finally, cold warriors find it vexing to pin the "terrorist" label on their indoor ideological enemies. As Muravchik uncomfortably comprehends, it is far easier to depict cuddly Lou Grant as a misguided fellow traveller than the agent of bloodthirsty slaughterers of innocents. And with the American left less radical and more "reasonable" than ever, the FBI has difficulty in keeping a straight face with only the transparent olive leaf of "counterterrorism" to replace the cloak of anticommunism that for so long masked its sacred mission to narrow the American polity to the range of ideas and attitudes one might find at an Indianapolis accountants' convention.

"Communism" stopped being the equivalent of "boo!" in 1972, when Nixon toasted Mao. With the majority of the world's commies suddenly on our side against the Russkies, the spectacle of collectivism begat a complexity American politicians abhor.

Even though communism no longer packs its old punch, we can expect it to survive, if even in a subdued spirit, for some time. That is because of the special rewards derived from it.

We have granted ourselves the convenient indulgence of drawing a fine distinction between the evil of the devil and the evil of communism. While Satan may be fought solely with the weapons of virtue, we deem it acceptable, if not *de rigueur*, to break every law of God and man in the battle against communism. Thus when a minister is found fondling as well as fleecing the flock, he is shamed as a hypocrite and a sinner. But the anticommunist who deals dope to buy eye-gougers for his death squad is, at worst, overly ardent in his devotion to freedom and democracy.

There is a spin current in Congress, especially in the case of Manuel Antonio Noriega's Panama and the other benighted satrapies of Central America, which holds that Reagan's policy-makers have been so single-minded in their anticommunism that they ended up being used, if not abused, by the dictators, dope dealers or other miscreants on their payroll. That is like saying that Mata Hari used espionage in order to get sex.

Chales Peguy, the French Catholic writer, wrote that all things begin in mysticism and end in politics. Anticommunism, it seems, is an exception to that rule. It begins in politics and invariably ends in scandal. ■

Peter Karman writes frequently for *In These Times*.

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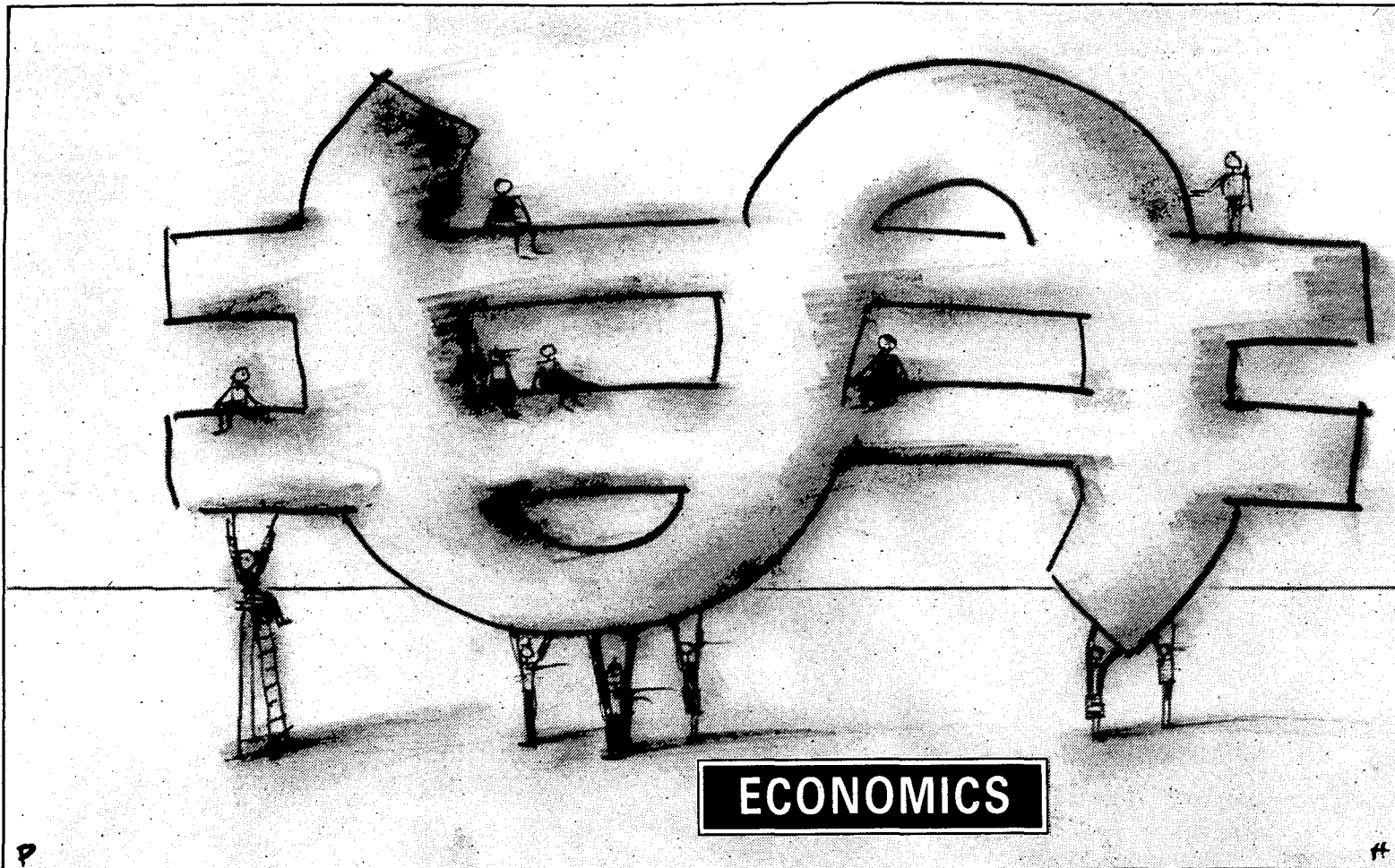
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A New Program for Democratic Socialism: Lessons from the Market-Planning Experience in Austria

By Leland Stauber
Four Willows Press (Box 322,
Carbondale, IL 62903), 412 pp., \$35.00

By Lewis Lipsitz

IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT A BOOK COMES along that reopens as many basic questions of socialist theory and practice as this one. Although it appears at first to be mainly a case-study of Austria's post-World War II experience with managing a large nationalized sector, Leland Stauber's reach is far more ambitious.

For Stauber, the Austrian experience exemplifies the problems and possibilities of various forms of management in a nationalized economic sector. This helps focus on issues of property, control, market and planning—some of the most central, unresolved issues in socialist thought. His main contribution is a fresh look at the possibilities of integrating market and plan, social ownership and decentralized levels of control.

In so doing, Stauber breaks through many of the stale categories of socialist thinking in the West. He considers how a socialized economy could be thoughtfully combined with use of the market and a highly decentralized system of investment. This is no small achievement. No one familiar with the socialist past will come away from the book without some new thoughts about the socialist future.

Stauber introduces his study with an overview of his purpose. He discusses the American economic, political and ideological situation, stressing the severe problems of so-

Socialist hybrid: planning the market, marketing the plan

cial inequality in a society where the wealthiest 1 percent of the adult population controls more than 25 percent of all financial property and personal assets. He explores the web of interactions between highly concentrated personal wealth and the laissez-faire ideology of our society. Stauber argues that a Cold War mentality has made the U.S. see only two basic economic alternatives—market versus central planning.

Building a New Deal: He regards his own approach as an effort to build on the New Deal experience that helped introduce innovative economic alternatives between these extremes—such as the Tennessee Valley Authority. He also, in this introduction, explores traditional socialist ideas about economic planning. On the one hand, we have the Soviet Union's brand of central planning—which has achieved its successes by imposing high rates of savings and investment through authoritarian political controls and not because of any intrinsic advantages of centralized economic planning. This point has become vividly clear of late, and not only in the USSR.

In regard to the democratic socialist experience, Stauber points to the tendency to identify planning with public ownership and the conservative political implications that have evolved from this. If, as he puts it, the purpose of modern socialism is planning, and this planning can be accomplished by social ownership of a few key industries and utilities,

this leaves untouched the rest of the property system. Capitalism thereby remains largely intact.

In addition, post-WWII economic experience has shown that high levels of growth are possible in capitalist economies without extensive planning. Finally, Stauber points out that socialists have often repelled potential supporters with their entrenched ideas about forms of economic control. Citizens who might support greater social equality find the socialist focus on centralized planning a threat.

Stauber observes that in recent decades democratic socialists have veered back toward the market and often favor the maximum utilization of competition. In this context, he wonders how the advantages of competition can be reconciled with planning and flexible decision-making when most of an economy comes under social ownership.

Nitty gritty: If socialists want to displace the private investment mechanisms, what will take the place of these mechanisms? He asks nitty-gritty questions such as: who will appoint and remove the top management of socialized corporations; and who will have power over the external financing of socialized corporations? As Stauber rightly points out, the discussion of such administrative issues is one of the weakest aspects of the socialist tradition. Yet he considers the issues of control and investment to be the core questions for a democratic

socialism that hopes to employ market mechanisms.

What follows are nine chapters on the Austrian experience with managing the large nationalizations that followed the war. I am not a specialist in a position to painstakingly critique Stauber's account of this history, but he strives throughout to relate his Austrian analysis to the larger questions at hand.

Stauber presents a wealth of interesting detail in a consistently provocative and helpful manner. He covers such topics as the ideological

Stauber shows a new way of conceiving how socialism might work, a way that appears to avoid excessive centralization and uses the powers of the market.

and historical backgrounds to nationalization; the experience with various methods of control of the nationalized industries from ministerial to holding-company to more market-like methods; issues of subsidy and workers' involvement, questions of the effects of nationali-

zation on equality, and the lessons of Austrian planning for socialist theory.

In regard to this last, he summarizes basic lessons: that there is an underlying tension between democracy and planning "that can be mediated but not removed"; that problems of forecasting and bureaucratic rivalry make comprehensive economic planning highly inefficient; that there is no substitute for competitive pressures on enterprises in terms of promoting efficiency and innovation; that there is a frequent and serious problem of government being used by vested interests to prevent change.

Stauber believes that this last issue is best dealt with by making subsidies as public as possible and therefore subject to political challenge. He also points out that while financial gains to the rich have ceased in Austria's nationalized sector, they have continued apace in the rest of the economy.

Local control: In his final chapter Stauber proposes a market socialism with decentralized investment through locally owned and controlled investment banks. Here is a set of ideas that struck this reader as eye-opening: Stauber rethinks the administrative and political arrangements of a socialist polity, complete with attention to the likely failures and difficulties of such a scheme. Stauber combines a Fabian emphasis on the "boring" details of administrative and economic life with a consistent commitment to a society rooted in equality. And his ingenious discussion comes at a moment when many socialists have basically lost faith in the possibility of making substantial inroads into the system of property ownership.

Stauber shows us a new way of conceiving how socialism might work, a way that appears to avoid the problems of excessive centralization and uses the powers of the market. No summary will do justice to the complexity of Stauber's conception, but he sees a socialist economy as combining three basic sectors: publicly owned enterprises; a market socialism sector that uses the locally owned development banks; and a private sector.

If I take issue with any part of Stauber's work, it is perhaps his optimism in believing that new ways of thinking can somehow directly force political change. Wasn't that the error of the "utopians" who imagined their schemes might lead to real social change? Yet we are beginning to see vast shifts in communist systems that a short time ago would have seemed virtually impossible. Perhaps the political art of the possible, even in America, can be affected by imagining just what new possibilities there are. ■

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The Dangerous Doctrine

By Saul Landau
Westview Press, 208 pp., \$24.95

By Marshall Windmiller

Cold War legacy and the national security state

PART OF THE LONG-LASTING DAMAGE done to democracy by McCarthyism was the virtual disappearance from the American political lexicon of two important words: "imperialism" and "fascism." In Sen. Joseph McCarthy's day, the use of these words was enough to identify one as a communist or fellow traveller, and as a consequence prudent academics who valued their jobs not only treated the words with great caution, but also looked askance at anyone

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who used them to describe contemporary phenomena.

In academe, imperialism became a 19th-century atavism, and fascism was buried in the library stacks with Hitler, Tojo, Mussolini and Peron. Anybody who talked about American imperialism must have been reading Lenin's famous little tract, and was therefore suspect.

While the climate of McCarthyism eased in the late '50s, the political vocabulary remained damaged. Thus an important question relating to these two words could not be adequately examined, namely, can you have one without the other? Or put another way, does the expansion and maintenance of empire eventually require fascist discipline at home? Without some form of fascism at home, can a government impose on its people the sacrifices necessary to maintain the empire abroad?

A common language: A major dilemma for a writer who wants to examine these questions is whether or not to resurrect the two moribund words. It is no longer so much a question of what people will think you are if you use them, but whether they will understand what you are talking about. What do college students know about the parallels between Mussolini in Ethiopia and Reagan in Nicaragua, for example? Or between I.G. Farben and General Dynamics or McDonnell Douglas?

Saul Landau is a writer, filmmaker, investigative reporter, university lecturer, political organizer and a senior fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies. He is not afraid to address difficult questions or use the hoary words, although he uses them sparingly. He prefers to talk about the "doctrine of national security" and the "national security state," tracing their development from roots in 19th-century imperialism to full flower in the Truman administration, and poisonous fruition under Ronald Reagan.

Since the Truman administration, says Landau, the U.S. has run the "largest imperial system ever known in world history." The doctrine of national security that provides the rationale for this empire is com-

posed of the following assumptions, rarely questioned in public discourse:

- The U.S. should control vast areas overseas;

- All change in foreign countries is threatening and should be resisted, unless, of course, it is change in a pro-American direction;

- U.S. foreign policy is above international law, and the elites that formulate it are above the law at home;

- Socialism is a threat to American security, and must not be allowed to succeed anywhere lest it be an example to others and enhance the prestige of the Soviet Union. "When stripped of its veneers," says Landau, "national security is nothing more than opposition to the Soviet Union and the ideology of socialism."

National security state: It was upon this doctrinal foundation that President Harry Truman launched the Cold War and constructed the national security state. Its characteristics can also be itemized:

- A bifurcated government, one part for display, the real part secret and operating in disregard of the law;

- The perpetuation of wartime powers in peacetime, some exercised openly, others in secret;

- The interchangeability of government and corporate elites;

- The formation of an artificial consensus by invoking the debate-stifling concept of bipartisanship and red-baiting those who dissent. Citing Truman's Federal Employee Loyalty Program as the beginning of this process, Landau says that McCarthyism could just as well have been labelled Trumanism;

- Habitual governmental lying. During the Johnson administration "lying became endemic if not organic to the national security apparatus."

Different presidents played different variations on these themes. Kennedy tried to make a science out of counterinsurgency, and hid his aggression behind lofty rhetoric and the Peace Corps. Johnson sent the Marines into the Dominican Republic and escalated the war in Vietnam. Worried that the anti-war movement might get out of hand and jeopardize the national security state itself, Nixon opened relations with China, withdrew from Vietnam and began detente with the USSR. But the CIA plot that overthrew Allende in Chile made it clear that he had not abandoned the doctrine of national security.

Getting to Reagan: There was continuity under Ford. He exported the national security model to the Third World, and instructed Latin

American dictatorships in scientific methods of repression.

Carter vacillated between an emphasis on human rights and the hard line anti-communism of his national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski. His Panama Canal treaty seemed to recognize the imperatives of Third World nationalism, but the more progressive aspects of his presidency collapsed under the strain of the Iran hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The scene was set for Ronald Reagan.

The Reagan variation of the doctrine of national security combined the worst contributions of all his predecessors:

- Support "freedom fighters" all over the world if they oppose left-wing, socialist or anti-American governments;

- Prop up any dictator threatened by revolution so long as he is pro-American and anti-communist;

- If, despite American efforts, the dictator cannot hold on to power, step in and take credit for getting rid of him, as with Duvalier in Haiti and Marcos in the Philippines;

- Use force only where the cost is low, the casualties minimal, and the outcome is quickly achieved, as in Grenada and the bombing of Libya;

- Build up nuclear and conventional military forces.

The pursuit of this doctrine has kept us on the brink of disaster in Central America and has turned the White House over to a military junta and Edwin Meese III.

Landau has written a scholarly polemic that traces the development of American imperialism from the beginning of the republic to the dirty war in Nicaragua and provides a useful conceptual scheme to explain how it evolved and how it works. It should prove a valuable college text, and is sure to stimulate discussion and debate.

A book like this cannot cover everything, but I wish it had a bit more analysis of the origins and nature of anti-communism in this country, particularly since Landau acknowledges its extraordinary importance in forming attitudes about foreign affairs. Many have forgotten the powerful negative impact on American

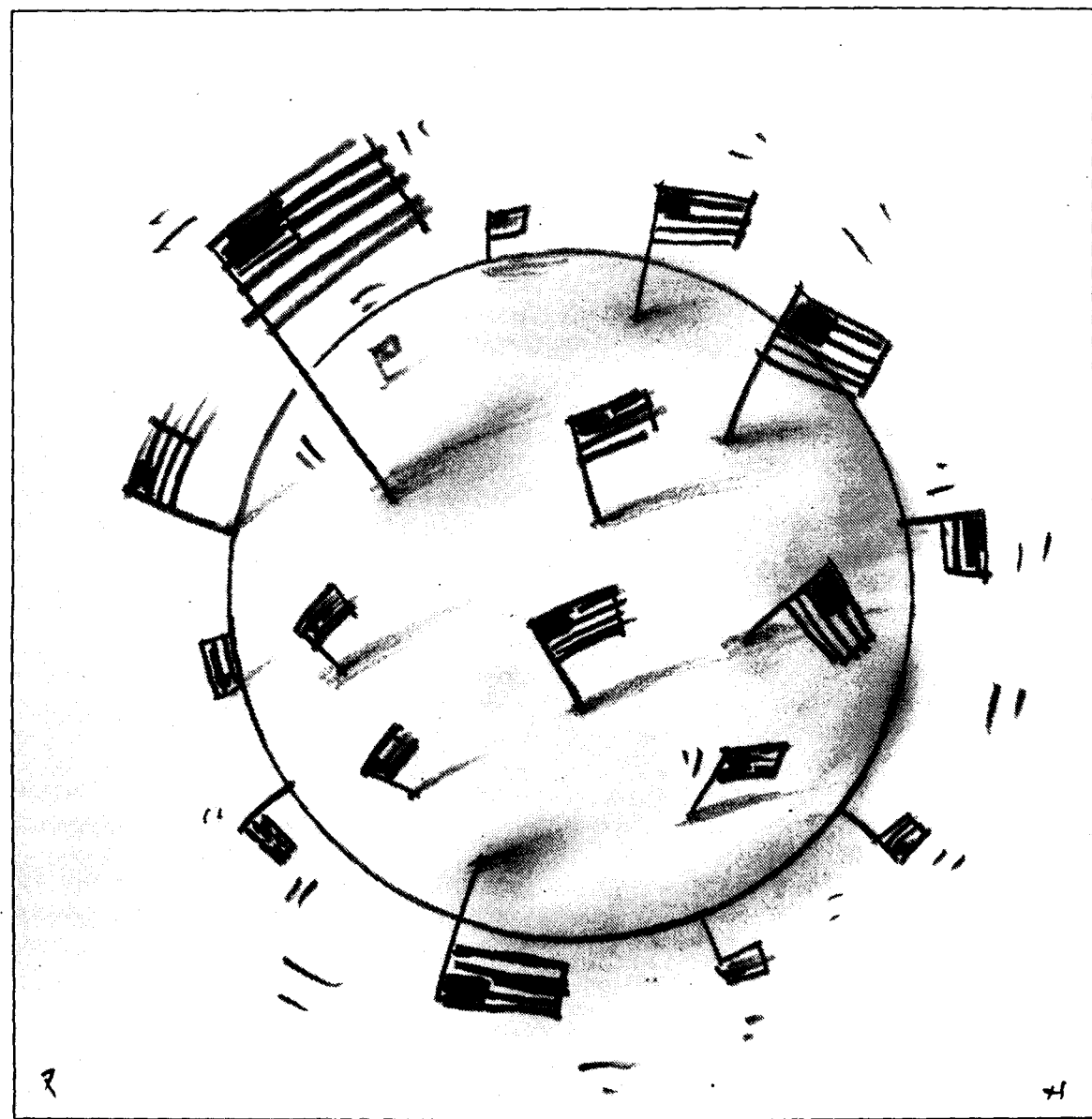
opinion of the Soviet decision to make a separate peace with the Germans in World War I, to say nothing of the 1939 Nazi Soviet Pact. It would also have been helpful to provide some detail and analysis of the way "atheistic communism" has been used to satisfy the need of Protestant fundamentalists for a modern incarnation of Satan.

Landau is neither cynical nor discouraged by the trend of events. He has hope for a way out. He says that those who understand what is going on must move from protest to a new phase of activity that can appeal to the millions of adults who do not vote. The key is the concept of human rights. Landau cites a speech by Carter's Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, which listed three categories of human rights: the integrity of the person; the vital needs such as food, shelter and medical care; and political and civil liberties.

The U.S. stresses the political and civil while the Soviet Union stresses food, shelter and medical care. Most Third World countries have none of these. "In order to make human rights a firm foundation for future policy," Landau argues, "large publics must understand procedural and substantive elements as part of a bonded ethical doctrine." This presumably is the task of public education and progressive political action. Landau has made a valuable contribution to the process, by pointing out the first step toward understanding: an appreciation of how we got to where we are, and what is necessary to change direction.

Marshall Windmiller is a frequent contributor to *In These Times*.

Landau traces the doctrine of national security from its roots in 19th-century imperialism to full flower in Truman's administration, and poisonous fruition under Reagan.



Hairspray
Directed by John Waters
Five Corners
Directed by Tony Bill

By Pat Aufderheide

NOW THAT, AS *NEWSWEEK* TELLS us, "the '80s are over," the '60s are being given a nostalgia-bath as well as the occasional critical wringing out. Two current films locate themselves on the edge of the full-blown '60s. Both are made by veterans of the era, fascinated by the texture of white urban working-class life, but very different in their takes on the recent past.

John Waters' *Hairspray*, its narrative anchored to early rock'n'roll, is another of the director's exuberant flaunting of American kitsch-as-culture, with a surprisingly direct anti-racist theme pushing the plot. *Hairspray* looks cheerfully forward to an era in which fashion and politics are tightly interwoven.

John Waters trafficks in glorious tackiness. His films (*Pink Flamingos*, *Female Trouble*, *Polyester*) seem hellbent on a mission to shock the lower middle class out of it prudish inferiority complex. *Hairspray* is a Miss Manners lesson on the difference between good bad taste and bad bad taste. Waters' most mild-mannered film to date, it's also the most expensive, although at under \$3 million it's still a low-low budget production by Hollywood standards. More sweetly wacky than bizarre, *Hairspray* is about how racism is not just silly but in bad bad taste. **Divine and Corny:** *Hairspray* featured, in his last role, the divine Divine, who died on March 7. A female impersonator made nationally famous by Waters, Divine became the incarnation of good bad taste. This time he played Edna, the mother of a mini-Divine, Tracy (Ricki Lake).

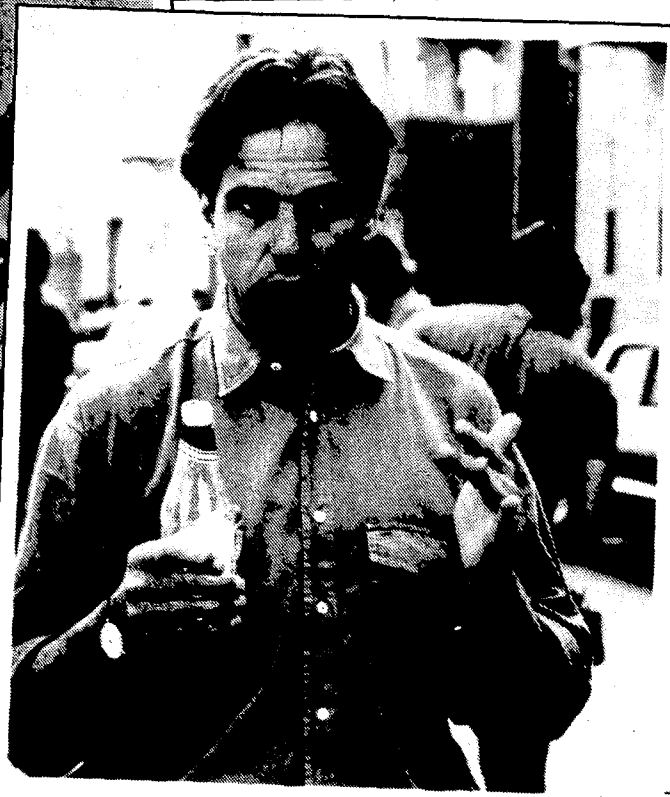
Tracy's just an average teenager, with a mom who takes in ironing and a dad who runs a practical-joke store. She dreams of getting on *The Corny Collins Show*, a local *American Bandstand* look-alike program. Tracy is immensely fat and her clothes are cut to drape a refrigerator, but she has poise and good humor, and becomes the star of the afternoon show.

She displaces the snooty Amber Von Tussle (Colleen Fitzpatrick), whose dad and mom (Debbie Harry and Sonny Bono, lending an appropriately tacky celebrity gloss to the production) are grooming her for a commercial future. Amber's mom and dad, who own an amusement park, are fierce segregationists, and as sponsors of *The Corny Collins Show* they aren't eager to see blacks dancing to "Negro music" on TV.

Tracy's black friends teach her dances and turn her on to hot



Directors John Waters and Tony Bill.



FIVE CORNERS

Hairspray and *Five Corners*: the sticky issue of '60s nostalgia

rock'n'roll and R&B (with the help of R&B artist Ruth Brown, who plays Motormouth Maybell). Soon Tracy is into demonstrations and lands in jail. In the perfect fairy tale ending, Tracy, freed by her trusty black friends, ends up wearing a queen-for-a-day type crown as Miss Auto Show 1963.

Cultural tuna melt: Waters has previously demonstrated his fascination with the overlap between appearance and reality, between fame and self-esteem, between fashion statements and social statements in the kitschy postwar culture that he calls home in Baltimore. *Hairspray*, which features some truly amazing early '60s hairdos, reiterates that point.

As you can see from Tracy's meteoric career, the fact that image and substance have come together in a cultural tuna melt creates new possibilities for the erstwhile dowdy, ugly and discriminated-against. In this movie blacks have the best music, the best dancing, the hippest clothes and, of course, the best choice in friends—cheerful good old girl Tracy.

Of course in real life it wasn't all that easy. Waters based the story on the local Baltimore TV program *The Buddy Dane Show*, highly popular until it was finally desegregated, when it went off the air in 1964. But then, Waters knows that in real life blacks don't dance their way to integration, and that vicious segregationists aren't laughed out of harm's way, any more than fat lower-class girls become the girlfriends of the most popular boys in school. In fact, everybody knows that—and that's what makes the goofy good humor of *Hairspray* so funny. It thumbs its nose at

exclusivism of all kinds, and invites you to conspire to do the same.

Changing times: *Five Corners* makes macabre populism out of the same era, in a different neighborhood. While Tracy is learning to iron her hair (beatnik influence) instead of rapping it, the kids in *Five Corners* are variously sniffing glue, getting jobs and dreaming of civil rights. Tracy's mom says, as if she's just thought of it, "The times they are a-changing. Something is blowing in the wind." The kids in *Five Corners* listen, without ironic distance, to the song.

The movie was directed and produced by Tony Bill, who for 25 years has been an improbable Hollywood success story. Beginning his movie career as an actor in the '60s, he produced *Steelyard Blues* (1973), *The Sting* (1975), *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *Going in Style* (1979). His directorial debut, *My Bodyguard* (1980), was a growing-up movie that didn't genuflect before the teen audience. As his record shows, Tony Bill stubbornly works within conventions that usually recycle truisms and manages to get at a nut of authenticity. It may not be earthshaking, but it makes the difference between sitcom-and-TV-special populism and popular art.

for *Moonstruck*, it was another one for the record. *Moonstruck*, that goofy valentine to neighborhood life, to love on the wrong corner, and to America's romance with the concept of ethnicity, was actually Shanley's second screenplay. The first, *Five Corners*, released shortly after *Moonstruck*, has much in common with the hottest box office hit in the U.S. today, including its New York neighborhood location. It also has some critical differences.

Character and caricature: Shanley, son of a meat packer and telephone operator, grew up in the East Bronx before going to college and the Marines, and he clearly draws from his own youth in both films. In both there's shameless corn and real affection. There's the self-confidence that lets the writer caricature a character, knowing that self-dramatization is part of daily life among people who think of themselves as ordinary.

But *Moonstruck* is executed at several more removes from Shanley's own story than *Five Corners*, which sometimes falls into the special pit reserved for brilliant young writers and their own growing-up stories. *Five Corners* is Shanley's adolescence worked over heavily by literary devices that sometimes threaten to club it to

murderous red arrow—that project beyond the edge of viewer tolerance. Of all the gimmicks littering the movie, these two perhaps best capture the fatal mix of sentimental and grotesque that can sandbag *Five Corners*. Too bad, because much in the film is genuinely moving.

It takes place in 1964, on the eve of upheaval in the lives of its characters and the nation. In the bleak working-class world of the East Bronx, an oddball high-school couple—Linda (Jodie Foster) and her sometime boyfriend James (Todd Graff)—are flanked by forces of light and darkness.

Light comes in the shape of Harry (Tim Robbins), the stalwart son of a policeman who was killed in the line of duty. Harry wants to go off with SNCC organizers to get on the civil rights frontlines in the South. Darkness is Heinz (John Turturro) the psychotic who once tried to rape Linda and has just come back to town, crazier than ever. The character reminds you of some of the flakier Elmore Leonard villains. But if he's derivative as written, Turturro fills him with a horrifying presence. Turturro played the sidekick in *The Sicilian* and has already won a handful of awards for his Broadway work; his performance here guarantees the film a place, if no other, in future Turturro retrospectives.

Neighborhood portraits: Least effective are the plot-driven action scenes. The film's best moments put what is usually the backdrop—the idiosyncratic lives of working people—in the foreground. Two glue-sniffing girls, basically sweet kids, get into some precarious sexual escapades in an elevator shaft. Harry's mom has a running dialogue with him on the subject of his dog, a discussion that encodes a host of other concerns. Linda, who works in her father's pet shop, has developed a bad attitude about tropical fish.

Honest curiosity—not always sympathy but fascination—lies behind Shanley's character sketching, brought out by Tony Bill's direction. ("I ask new writers to sink or swim with me, and in return I sink or swim with them," he says. He may not have counted on both happening in the same movie.) The incidents add up to portraits not just of individual people but of a way of life. "The neighborhood is the central character in the story," says Shanley, and he's right.

The denizens of John Waters' Baltimore wouldn't recognize the dwellers of Shanley's and Bill's East Bronx. But would any of them recognize their own neighborhoods 25 years later? Looking at these movies, you realize how long ago, measured in increments of cynicism, the early '60s were. And you wonder what the movies that recall the '80s will look like.

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John Waters' *Hairspray* is a Miss Manners lesson on the difference between good bad taste and bad bad taste.

Bill has a reputation for launching new talent, especially scriptwriters such as David Ward and Martin Brest. When John Patrick Shanley won the Oscar nomination

death—somewhat like the psychotic who bashes the penguins he finds so cute in *Five Corners*.

Yes, penguins. They're one of several plot devices—another is a

Makeba returns to U.S. and goes back to basics

By J. Poet

PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES have a 'Tarzan movie' view of Africa," says Miriam Makeba. "That's because in the movies all you see are jungles and animals, or occasionally the pictures from South Africa of people being beaten by the police. You don't realize that we live normal lives there, just as Americans and Europeans do. We watch television and listen to the radio and go to dances and fall in love." Makeba (pronounced Ma-Kay-Bah), the first international pop star to come out of South Africa, is taping a segment of the program *Studio A* for Oakland's KTVU. While the bright studio lights glare, she does her best to correct the misperceptions that most Americans still have about Africa.

"I was in Texas last week, talking to people in a book store. When I told them about my life at home this big man in a cowboy hat said [switches to a Texas accent and doubles her volume], 'Ya mean ta tell me y'all got TVs in Af-ree-ca?'" Makeba laughed and shook her head. "America is a very media-oriented society, and if people don't see you on TV or hear you on the radio, you don't exist."

Makeba may not exist in the U.S. due to past "political problems" with her record company here, but she maintains a busy worldwide touring schedule, regularly headlining in Europe, Asia and Africa. "It's almost funny when I come to the U.S., because people ask me why I don't sing anymore. I tell them I sing all around the world, but if you don't—or rather, *can't*—sing in the U.S. then you haven't really made it."

Thanks to her high profile on Paul Simon's *Graceland* tour, Makeba's ready to make another impression on the U.S. market. Her latest album, *Sangoma* (Warner Bros.), is doing well, as is her recently published biography, *Makeba: My Story* (New American Library) and plans are underway for an American tour.

New world records: Like many kids all over the world, Makeba's first love was the record player. "When I was young, I never bought records," she says, "because my brother Joseph played saxophone and he had a record player and all the records I wanted."

Makeba started singing with friends in a part-time jazz combo, and came to the attention of Harry Belafonte in the late '50s. She had a small part as a nightclub singer in a low-budget, anti-apartheid film called *Come Back, Africa*, and her performance electrified everyone who saw it. Belafonte pulled some strings and brought Makeba to the

U.S. by way of London.

"There was a major culture shock," she recalls. "I had to stay in London a few weeks while the South African government decided what to do with me. When I got hungry I'd go out to eat, but the restaurant I went to had white people eating in it, and back home that meant black people had to stay out, so I cooked quite a few meals on the hot plate in my room."

Makeba eventually got her visa and took the U.S. by storm. She cut a string of commercially successful albums, both as a solo artist and as

MUSIC

a featured member of Harry Belafonte's international folk music review. In the '60s, Makeba also spoke regularly at the United Nations denouncing the South African regime. She was the only artist invited to perform at the first meeting of the Organization of African Unity and sang at the independence celebrations of Kenya and Tanzania. Still, there was no political or economic fall-out 'til she married Stokely Carmichael in 1968. Carmichael, a leader of the Black Power movement at the time, was criticizing the apartheid that existed in the U.S. and the powers that be took exception to his words. After Makeba's marriage things got nasty.

"Suddenly the concert bookings vanished," Makeba said. "The record company told me that they weren't going to honor my recording contract. It was one thing to speak out against racism abroad, but when it came closer to home people wouldn't listen." Makeba shrugged.

Thanks to her high profile on Paul Simon's *Graceland* tour, Miriam Makeba is poised to make another impression on the U.S. market.

"I'd already been in exile for 10 years, and the world is free, even if the countries in it aren't, so I packed my bags and left."

Back to Africa: As a result of her work with the anti-apartheid movement at the U.N., Makeba had met many of the leaders of post-colonial Africa. In 1969 she accepted an invitation from President Sékou Touré of Guinea to relocate there. Makeba has made her home in Guinea ever since, although she frequently visits friends and relations in this country. During a visit in 1986 the *Graceland* connection was made.

"I was visiting Washington, D.C., in December of '86 for a dinner with the Black Congressional Caucus," Makeba said. "After dinner I got a call from Hugh [Masekela, another South African musician in exile, and Makeba's third husband] and he arranged for me to meet Paul Simon. The tour was still an idea at the time, but we talked and two months later I was in Rotterdam with the *Graceland* tour. From there we went to Zimbabwe, and eventually we went all around the world. I'm grateful to Paul Simon because he's allowed me to bring my music back to my friends in this country."

"After the U.S. tour, Paul introduced me to Russ Titelman, and he asked if I'd record for Warner's." Considering the fact that Warner's dropped Makeba in the '60s, that turn of events must have been satisfyingly ironic. Makeba smirked. "Yesss," she said, drawing the syllable out.

Xhosa tradition: Makeba's new album, *Sangoma*, is a strongly traditional work. "That was Titelman's idea," she said. I would never have dreamed about doing a traditional album, but Russ was interested in the vocal tradition of my people, the Xhosa. Since Warner's had good luck with Ladysmith Black Mambazo, he decided to take a chance with my style of traditional music.

"I know many people were expecting something in the Township Style, like Paul Simon's album, but there's more to South Africa than Township music. South Africa has many styles, kwela, jazz, mbaqanga, pop, marabi, even the blues. I could do albums for 10 years and never repeat a style."

"The title, *Sangoma*, is a word that means healer, although the white men translated it as 'witch doctor.' Before the whites came to our country we had herbal doctors or traditional healers who could cure us when we were sick. We weren't waiting for Western medicine to make us healthy, you know. My mother was *isangoma*, a healer, so the album is named in her honor."

As the interview was drawing to a close, several long-time Makeba fans crowded into the room. One man had a copy of Makeba's first American album for her to autograph. Makeba signed it, but she seemed embarrassed. After he left the room I asked how she felt when she listened to her older work.

"It's a funny thing," she said, "but I'll be at a dinner party and invariably someone will bring out one of my old records and put it on. I don't like it because all I can hear are the imperfections. I don't think I've ever liked one of my records."

"When you're preparing a record for release you have to listen to it over and over again, so you get resigned to it, but I'm always hearing the things that could have made it better. It's almost like a baby picture that your parents bring out to show people at a party. You know it's you, but it's still slightly embarrassing."

J. Poet is a Berkeley, Calif.-based critic and editor.

MEDIA BEAT

By Pat Aufderheide

Israeli Army as Movie Studio

The Israeli Army has been fighting not to suppress but to distribute a feature film that offers a disturbing view of the war in Lebanon. *Ricochets* was made under its auspices as an instructional film, and went on to become the top Israeli box office hit of 1986. It also became a buzzword at Cannes, but its distributor never made any foreign sales. The army's impatient for revenues, and has tried to get the rights back, unsuccessfully.

Just a Joke?

A satire of TV sponsorship has turned into a marketing gold rush in Italy. An imaginary Brazilian cocoa was the vehicle for skits at the expense of advertisers on a popular variety show. But as Italians have flocked to stores looking for the cocoa, marketers have rushed to secure rights to the name—even the state network RAI, which airs the program.

Why Redford Won't Run

When *Film Comment* asked Robert Redford (*The Candidate*) if he'd run for political office, the answer was "no." Why? The director and star explained: "So much of what we're living in, in terms of what we're told by the administration, is fantasy. It's dream talk. And it's dream talk aimed at creating the illusion that we're this perfect country, strong, courageous and bold. The country at large obviously doesn't want to hear we're not. So we support people who feed that fantasy. I don't like that. I don't want to be a part of that. And I don't think it's a negative to not want to be part of bullshit." And who better to judge what's fantasy, dream and bullshit than one of the most successful stars in the industry that puts all those items into mass production?

The Sky Is Falling

How good is disaster coverage in broadcast and print media? According to a symposium featured in the latest *Journal of Communication*, it's a disaster area. Individual events take precedence over issues, and hazard stories leave out the crucial ingredient: risk. (How many people are at risk? What's the mortality rate? How to weigh costs and benefits?) In reportage of nuclear accidents, officials seem the major obstacle to good reporting. But in the case of Chernobyl, researcher David M. Rubin reported, Soviet reports were "late, meager but probably not untrue," while Western reports were "fast, massive and often misleading."

No Mexicans, No Dirty Streets

The first prime-time TV show featuring Hispanic lead characters has been axed at ABC, which has muttered into its corporate beard about "creative differences." Jeffrey Bloom (producer of the projected show, *Juarez*) told trade magazine *Electronic Media* that an ABC official told him, "We don't want to see any Mexicans or dirty streets in this show." Bloom contends ABC wanted "Georgia O'Keeffe sunsets, pretty cactus and quaint adobe houses." What they got was "El Paso, which is a dusty and sort of ugly border town that is 70 percent Hispanic." Hollywood Hispanic groups have protested the cancellation.

Oscars International

The small clique of working and retired professionals that decides the Academy Awards every year isn't noted for its expansive international spirit. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (originally created as an industry response to unionizing) even created a special category for "Foreign Language Film," more or less to pre-empt criticism of Hollywood's chauvinism. This year the Academy has peeked cautiously across national borders, with major nominations for Italian Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, filmed in China; British John Boorman's *Hope and Glory*; and Swedish Lasse Hallstrom's *My Life as a Dog*. There is barely a hint of interest beyond the First World, of course, except for an acting nomination for Argentine Norma Aleandro in *Gaby—A True Story*. The denizens of the world's most glamorous dream factory tend to navel-gaze at award time, but the rest of the world seems to love watching them do it. Every year the Academy Awards are beamed out to an audience of around one billion worldwide; last year the coverage was picked up in 87 countries. An early count this year showed Latin American countries from Argentina to Venezuela, and Panama to Paraguay (though not Nicaragua) signed up, with Asian countries putting in early bids as well.

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Dioxinville

Continued from page 13

whether a corporation that has transferred its assets can ultimately be held accountable. A recent ruling in a Michigan court found that a company can be, but most other states have been reticent about making such a determination.

Whether Vittorio de Nora can be implicated by U.S. authorities is another matter. As Vertac's apparent majority owner, he might bear responsibility for the company and its environmental liabilities. But de Nora may be out of reach, since he resides in a foreign country. The way things now stand under an international treaty, U.S. courts must rely on local courts in each country to serve any legal papers. A case currently before the Supreme Court, however, is examining whether plaintiffs in product liability cases can drag foreigners into U.S. courtrooms.

Then there are the legal questions surrounding the roles of Dow Chemical and Diamond Shamrock. Yet another corporate courtroom drama—either in Little Rock, if the government has its way, or in Memphis, if Dow wins the jurisdictional dispute—is expected to unfold later this year.

Looming questions: It is conceivable that the Dow-Vertac debt exchange could backfire on both companies. Several questions may be decided by the courts. Will Dow be forced to turn over the money and goods it retrieved from Vertac to the government agencies? Will Dow be ruled at fault in the plant workers' lawsuit for having supplied Vertac with the toxic herbicides in the first place? Finally, will possible involve-

ment of the de Nora family or Bricker be tackled by investigators, amid the tangle of corporate shufflings?

And when it comes to big companies, are there ramifications of Bricker's possible dealings with Vertac that might also apply to Occidental Petroleum? The Armand Hammer oil giant absorbed Diamond Shamrock Chemical back in 1986. Occidental, because of its ownership of the Hooker Chemical company that polluted Love Canal, was held liable in February by a federal judge for undetermined millions in cleanup costs surrounding that situation.

Meanwhile, Diamond's ex-chief executive Bricker and Vittorio de Nora apparently remain travelling partners. A source in Dallas says the men were recently observed paying visits to several American chemical companies, looking to strike up more business ventures.

All these questions and considerations could perhaps only be unravelled by a full-scale congressional investigation into the powers behind the nation's worst hazardous waste disaster. Some of those powers may already be worried about such a possibility. Diamond is still based in Dallas, where its legal counsel—Gardere and Wynne—is conveniently located in the Diamond Shamrock Tower. The same law firm is representing Inter-Ag—and Vertac's assets—in the battle against the government.

According to Arkansas' Patty Frase—who for the past seven years has led the fight to expose the chemical companies behind Jacksonville—somebody in Dallas apparently wants to know what the environmental movement knows about the chemical companies' dealings. A few months ago Frase says she

received a visit from a private investigator. He said he was with the Fred Meyers agency in Little Rock, but had been hired by a client in Dallas whom he would not identify. He brought with him a list of names of environmental activists, including one who has long battled Dow Chemical in Michigan, and wanted to know what information Frase might have about them. Frase says she refused to speak to him.

Lonely victims: But Frase will continue to speak out about Jacksonville's unprecedented toxic tragedy. So will many other residents, despite a reversal in federal court on March 1 that surprised even the judge. It was a jury trial, in which about 100 people living near the two city dump-sites had charged Vertac and Hercules with contaminating their property and damaging their health. Vertac settled with the citizens out of court, for an undisclosed sum, as the proceedings began. Then, after deliberating for two days, a Little Rock jury found Hercules innocent of negligence in its operation of the plant.

About fifty of the citizens staged a demonstration in Jacksonville three days later, gathering more water samples near the plant site in an effort to further document ongoing contamination. But unless the machinations of the chemical companies are probed further by federal investigators and environmental lawyers, the people of this small community in Arkansas are—and will remain—the lonely victims of governmental indifference and corporate manipulation.

The corporate maze leading to Jacksonville brings to mind a scene from the 1976 movie *Network*. In it, Mr. Jensen, the hitherto unseen power behind the megacorporation, stands at the end of a long conference table addressing the irreverent newscaster, Mr. Beal. Informing him that there is only one "vast...interwoven, interacting, multivaried, multinational dominion of dollars," Mr. Jensen goes on about the "natural order of things today."

"There is no America. There is no democracy," he says. "There is only IBM, ITT and AT&T, and DuPont, Dow, Union Carbide and Exxon.... The world is a college of corporations, inexorably determined by the immutable laws of business."

And so it goes in Jacksonville. ☐

Dick Russell is a freelance writer whose environmental reporting regularly appears in national publications.

Illinois

Continued from page 2

education and retraining; government, business and labor partnerships, including new university-based "centers of excellence"; tighter control of the merger and acquisition binge; and a \$500 million Fund to Re-Build America for "job-creating partnerships" in depressed areas. The fund would draw on Dukakis' major contribution to the "Massachusetts miracle," spreading economic growth more evenly throughout the state.

Populism 101: Economic populism has been the most explosive development in the Democratic primary. Ironically, the candidate who most people still expect to be nominated, Dukakis, shows the least understanding of or affinity for that message. He has succeeded largely by dint of money, organization, luck, a good record in office and expectations that he can win. By contrast to the other front-runner, Jackson, who most people assume could never be nominated and has no governmental record, has succeeded with that populist message—and without money, television advertising or extensive news coverage.

Democratic political strategist John Martilla, who is sympathetic to Dukakis, thinks that Dukakis' "affirmative" message of "managing the economy effectively" will gradually overshadow the protest votes tapped by Gephardt and Jackson, especially if the field narrows.

Jackson tries to pitch his campaign to "hope" as much as to anger, and the industrial states ahead offer ample opportunity for his message. Yet despite some inroads, like an endorsement by the big UAW local in Kenosha, Wis., Jackson is likely to get only a small fraction of the white, blue-collar vote with the remainder fragmented among Dukakis and the rest, as whoever can limp along to Atlanta keeps picking up some votes.

Despite the presence of a message that could bring those recently wayward voters back to the Democrats and unite them with blacks and middle-class liberals they often disdain, there doesn't appear to be anyone who can capitalize on it. But whoever is nominated will need to learn that message for this fall. If nothing else, Jackson may use his convention strength to teach a few lessons in elementary populism. ☐

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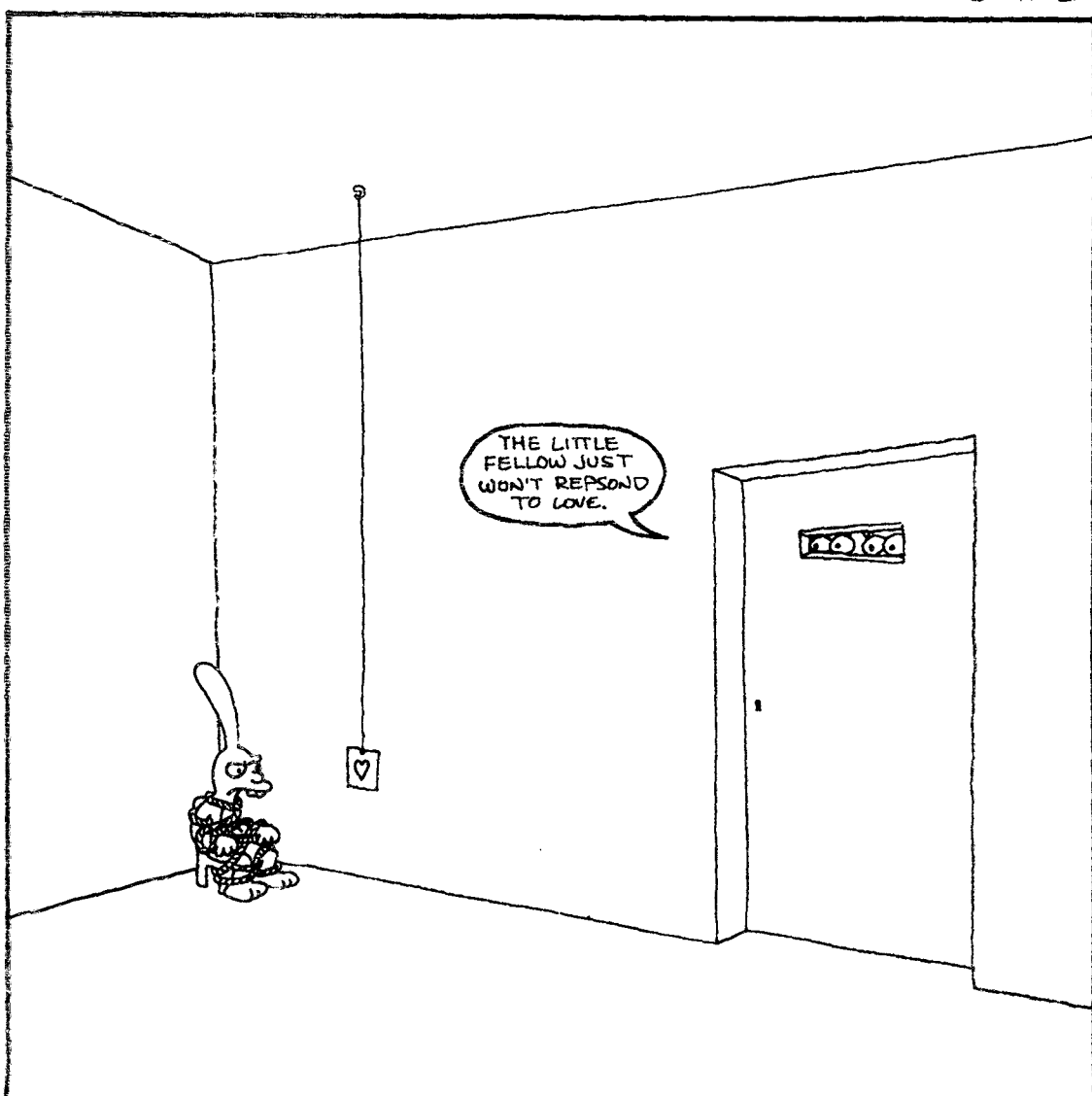
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MacBush, A Comedy in Five Acts
By Peter Gould
Whetstone Books (P.O. Box 355, Brattleboro,
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By Joel Schechter

WHEN BARBARA GARSON'S SATIRIC play *MacBird* opened in 1967 audiences relished its crude comparison of Lyndon Johnson to Macbeth. LBJ had not assassinated his predecessor as had Shakespeare's tyrant, but his escalation of the Vietnam War made him, too, a leader steeped in blood. A Texas-accented buffoon dressed for battle in a baseball catcher's mask and spiked shoulder pads, MacBird was hardly the noble leader Macbeth or Johnson pretended to be in their respective dramas. MacBird promised to spread his "Pox Americana" around the world, but he was defeated onstage. And offstage, Lyndon Johnson announced he would not seek another presidential term in 1968. It is unlikely that Garson's satire influenced LBJ's early retirement decision, but her humor buoyed the spirits of many.

Peter Gould, author of a new play entitled *MacBush*, would like to make a protective reaction strike and remove George Bush from the presidency before he is elected. His play, dedicated to Barbara Garson, portrays Bush as a treacherous lord who will stop at nothing to take over King Ronald's throne.

Brain dead or just resting? Before *MacBush* battles Lords MacDole and Kempf for the presidency, he visits his former office, the "Agency of Spies," to secure a liquid with which he puts King Ronald to sleep permanently (copying the terror technique developed by Hamlet's uncle, Claudius). Initially, however, no one can tell whether the president is dead. It is reported that:

*For weeks while Ronald slept, they
brought him out
To meetings, state functions, and
propped him up
And no one knew the difference....*

Gould's verse mimics the regional dialects and idioms of statesmen less wit-

tilly than Garson's play did; but then Lyndon Johnson and the Kennedy clan of the '60s had more distinct, imitable speech styles than Bush or Reagan. The currently reigning leaders specialize in bland if jovial reassurance, as described by MacBush: "I've studied at King Ronald's feet, how he/ Enters, as if just finishing a laugh./ He grins, winks; his every move says, 'See/ I'm one of you, yet bigger, happier./ I've aped his gestures, tried to drop my voice/ An octave, hung around with football stars./ But nothing's changed. I haven't struck a chord/ Among the people."

MacBush lacks acting talent, in other words, so he must turn to baser means of winning public support. In a cunning maneuver, he chooses Elizabeth MacDole as his running mate before she can consult her husband. Lord MacDole laments the loss of his wife, as if she had been brutally slain. "What treachery! MacBush will stop

at nothing.... He has no shame, no scruples," warns MacDole. (Robert Dole said almost the same of George Bush during the New Hampshire primary campaign, an instance of life imitating art.)

Gould replaces Shakespeare's three witches, prophets of Macbeth's future, with three televangelists. One of the evangelists resembles Pat Robertson, and he considers running for office himself, since "the next king must command/ The TV camera; he alone will win/ Who broadcasts the most power, comfort, calm.... Then why not me?" God spoils his campaign plans, however, because the Lord opposes evangelical support for the contras. God could be a Marxist-Leninist or a Sandinista in Gould's transcription of His word. (The FBI may want to check on this.) **Sappy ending:** The play ends with the triumph of the oppressed and the homeless, after Lords MacDole and Kempf se-

The play's the thing: a new
Shakespearean satire follows
in the tradition of *MacBird*.

cretly trade *MacBush* for hostages in the Mideast. They leave Vice President Elizabeth MacDole in charge of the country, although her husband may be impersonating her in a wig and skirt, according to ambiguous stage directions.

Political satire is an ephemeral art, and the next few primaries may render some of Gould's surprising, comic predictions obsolete. Dole's collapsing campaign may necessitate some rewriting, but *MacBush*, in some form, still warrants widespread reading and staging. Its best moments portray George Bush as a man haunted by the "wimp factor" and his own shady history, which is repeated as farce through the Bush-for-hostage deal.

Shakespeare's references to Macbeth's manhood acquire new meaning when *MacBush* admits, "I'm not a movie star,/ I've never tumbled with a starlet, I/ Have yet to cuddle with a chimpanzee..../ I'm a man! A real man.... and yet/ The paradox is: I must prove my manhood." To prove it, he orders an aide to call Daniel Ortega on the phone and see if he is "man enough to meet me face to face./ Whatever—tennis, golf, a yachting race,/ ...Let 'im name the time and place." The whining, prep-school side of Bush never lets him become steeped in blood; he prefers to subcontract that task to the contras and the CIA.

Over the past eight years we have become accustomed to viewing our president as (in Abbie Hoffman's words) the Actor in Chief. Plays like *MacBird* and *MacBush* extend that perception, so other politicians are seen as actors, knaves and fools. By having actors impersonate leading politicians and parody Shakespeare's rhetoric, Gould's play rehearses its audience for those offstage scenes, where they will hear politicians recite lines as laughable and mock-heroic as anything *MacBush* has to say. And even *MacBush* himself wonders whether he has heard his speeches before, on *Masterpiece Theater* or *Saturday Night Live*. I think they call them re-Rons. ■

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Joel Schechter teaches at the Yale School of Drama.



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